Chapter 1

MYTHS

TB The myths of the Bambara must be understood as a sum of knowledge, a kind of world view, and not as a sequence of fixed etiological stories. It may be said that they make up a metaphysics which includes a knowledge of the objects of creation as well as a knowledge of the principles of their state and action.

The knowledge of divine things takes its place within this ensemble but does not come first in time. The Bambara deals with creation and the cosmos, conceptualized as an entity peopled with deities, a cosmos of which he himself is the most significant expression. The following texts explain first the origin of creation, secondly the ordering of the perceptible universe, created from the primordial vibration, and finally the creation of originally immortal living beings on the earth molded by Pemba.

Domination of the mundane world and particularly of the human species was first assumed by one of Pemba's metamorphoses, the phallic tree balanza, which lived on blood and assimilated the strength of men. His reign was troubled by severe cosmic disorders provoked by the rebellion of the first-created female, Mousso Koroni. Today men are still subjected to the after-effects of these disorders. However, the fact that the tree abused its power caused Faro to rise up against it and vanquish it. Faro then reorganized the universe by establishing its boundaries and naming and classifying its component elements. On Earth, where death made its appearance due to the curse of the tree, the basis of this reorganization is the principle of duality, the "word" taught to men by Faro who from then on has the master of the Word and of restoring techniques which would, as needs arose, assure subsistence. The reign of Faro, whom henceforth men worshipped, was founded on order and measure and foreshadowed the "future words" which he is to disclose in the course of time.

/2/The sequence of mythical themes presents a structure of the cosmos; space and time; natural and supernatural worlds; categories, numbers, and the notion of the spatial and temporal cohesion of its elements (interdependence of phenomena). It situates the individual (body and spiritual principles) and in the psychological realm, describes

•773 the slow evolution of consciousness (concept of pain), judgment (concept of responsibility and guilt), will (concept of the creative effort and work), all of which develop in man with the advent of suffering
[761] and death. Death is felt to be an accident in the working out of the universal order, an accident compensated for in part by the conservation of spiritual principles and their reincarnation in accordance with the fundamental belief in the eternal resurrection of all things. The myth describes the first ritual, the rejuvenation, which ceases with the advent of death but is replaced by blood sacrifice which today is still the central practice of the rites (1).

1. Wherever possible the writer has avoided discussion of the details of myths so as not to distract the reader from the general line of the Bambara world view. But the scholar, in attempting to better understand the collective psychological processes of this people, may profitably study the numerous variant themes found among them.

The myths described below are the framework of the present-day Bambara religion and of the general cults to Pemba and Faro maintained by the people.

Preliminaries of Creation

1. The glã̃ glã̃ zo

772 The Bambara creation myths imply a philosophy of being and of the universe developed from the void, from nothing, fu (2).

[802] 2. This concept is expressed by a sign with the same name which can also be translated by "nothingness" or "zero" and is a part of the Bambara number system. See Fig. 1, No. 11. For a discussion of this sign denoting the continuity and proliferation of creation, see p. 102.

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3. On koni, see S. de Canay, Notes sur la théodicée bambara, pp. 188ff.

Creation of the Universe

772 773 At the center of yereyereli was the spirit, miri, in the spirit was the doing, wali; in the doing was the coming of all things, nali; and in nali was the division of all things, tali. These four terms also define the four basic elements of creation, respectively air, earth, fire, and water; air and fire being male, earth and water, female. (1)

1. "yereyereli was originally made up of four elements which enabled it to vibrate secretly," (yereyereli gale gale kono kera ni wale nani yè, o ya to a sera ka yereyereli su a la).

The miri was also "the egg of the world in which nature was enclosed." It is represented by three ovals, all contained within each other; this figure also expresses the three /11/ rotations made by yereyereli at each of the cardinal points (in the following order: north, south, east, west), each rotation stirring up the four elements (2). The central oval, or so de, "son of the house," is the primordial

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2. See Fig. 2, p. 34 . Creation is thus expressed by the numbers seven and 12, obtained by the addition and multiplication of three (male symbol, and number of rotations) and four (female symbol and number of elements). Seven is the symbol of man (homo) and of the principle of the universe; 12 is the symbol of the multiplication of beings and of the perpetual development of this universe.

grain which placed all things in the nature of the four elements. The intermediary oval, dyẽ wali gale, "the first action of the world,"

represents fertility; it determines man, the principal thing of the universe, who has also received from it the capacity for thought and knowledge. The external oval, dyẽ ko, "gate of the world," is essentially mobile; rotating upon itself, it dilates or contracts, depending upon the births or deaths of the multiple-formed matter it contains. It is this oval that makes all things in the universe "unable to escape from the sight of the creator" (1).

1. fẽw be dyele ngala ka yeli kono.

The essential part of that which the yereyereli stirred up as it rotated was the spirit. The spirit, inflated by all its potential power, finally began to sound. "The spirit resounded in the midst of facts," (2) and as it was the strongest element in space, it held itself up alone

2. miri ye manga ti walew tyela.

and arose. Then it burst and from it poured elements which slowly separated, dispersed, and ordered themselves. It is said of this event: "In the old days, all things came out together" (3). These fundamental

3. folo kow bõñuana.

elements, numbering twenty-two, are at the origin of creation which is classified into twenty-two categories.

The Bambara use several methods to order and name these elements. First, according to the fundamental system of creative thought, yo, they divide the elements into three groups of seven, to which a twenty-second is added.

The first seven, dyẽ dyo kã gale, "the first voice of the building of the world," express yereyereli before knowledge, but containing all things with man, "seed" of nature, in the first place. The seven following elements, dyẽ dyo kã saba "the third voice of the building of the world," denote the beginning of the knowledge of yereyereli as masculinity and assures all fertility. It is at this moment that the term koni appears, attributed to yereyereli, and expressing awe before creation. The last seven, dye dyo ka nani "the fourth voice of the building of the world," contains "the complete revelation of the dispositions and situations /12/ of all that was created";

772 yereyereli then becomes known as femininity and assures the supremacy
801 of femininity over nature. The twenty-second element sums up these
773 three groups of seven and expresses total knowledge (1).

1. The same progression of numbers as in the creative thought yo, characterizes the creation by vibration. Being 1, the vibration passed on to 2. At 2, it conceived invisible "light air" and the powers it contained were grouped together to form a whole. At 3, the powers became gravity, and the visible "heavy air" appeared. At 4, and only at that moment, creation, completely visible, was revealed to the consciousness. For further discussion of the "heavy air," see also S. de Ganay, Notes sur la théodicée bambara, p. 188.

Another division of the elements determines the categories. The first seven are the bõnuana of which it is said: "The seven bõnuana came out first" (2). Then came twelve bangini, births or bayeremani

2. Bõnuana wolo fla bwora folo. The word bõnuana means literally "come out together."

"discoveries," of which it is said: "Twelve discoveries were left in space" (3). After them, there appeared three jiginis, foundations or

3. Bangini tani fla bla ka kɛnɛ da.

dyoli, situations, of which it is said: "Three foundations ate up the world" (4). The first seven elements are the "states of the world";

4. Jigini saba ye dyɛ̃ dũ.

the next twelve, "the foundations of the world"; the last three, "the words of the world's situation" (5).

5. dyɛ̃ dyo tyoko; dyɛ̃ sigi tyoko; dyɛ̃ dyo ka.

772 The seven bõnuana summarize the general characteristics of beings
80| and things:
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1. kelẽña, unity;
2. makari, pity, mercy;
3. mako, necessity;
4. sinaya, aggression, jealousy;
5. fadena, rivalry;
6. maloya, shame;
7. sia, race, species, stock.

The twelve bangini, which follow, determine the qualities and destinies of the person:

1. ma ye ma ye, literally: a person is a person; gifts, possibilities of each, propositions and dispositions.
2. mako, mutual aid, simplicity, dignity, courtesy, wisdom.
3. sebaya, power, domination.
4. dyuguya, maliciousness, vulgarity, ferocity, difficulties.
5. kunanguya, bad luck, bad destiny, ill nature.
6. sira, road, guide, obedience, discipline.
7. ñafola, wealth, health, fertility.
8. adamadeña, brotherhood, humanity, liberty, kindness.
9. dahirime, food, material possessions.
10. saya, death, illness, infirmities, madness.
/13/ 11. ỹu, night, light and dark, secret, witchcraft.
12. kle, day, sun; all the boli altars of the Bambara.

The three jijini are respectively:

1. kun, the head that thought out the world.
2. ba, the womb that formed it.
3. fo, the word that created it.

772 Knowledge, fã̂, was born of three foundations which finally became
773 detached from the spirit (i). Knowledge opened up, divided, and

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1. The following prayer, relating to the fã̂, is sometimes recited: fango, ma dua, ma bo, fẽ̂ mbina, fẽ̂ nkumba, fẽ̂ ndaba, fẽ̂ semba, wolo tigi ye nye, djiri tigi ye nye, panve bwora na. O bwora mi, o nya nyimi senge do. Ntigi ye yereyere ye, ka bo miri kono, miri dane sandyi.

782 "Road of knowledge, I am not small, I am not big. A thing arrives, a thing with a large head, a large mouth, a large foot. I am the master of fertility; I am the master of trees. Where does it come from? It comes from the weariness of my seed. My master is the vibration, out of which came the spirit, the rain of which fertilizes."

772 773 contributed to the building of the visible world, especially engendering particles, moño moño, which entered into the composition of the earth, and a radiance, noro, used for the formation of the sky.

At the same time, the spirit let fall upon the earth (still in the process of formation) a heavy object in the form of a globule, kulu, which was later named pemba (1). Pemba, moving as a whirlwind to

1. From fɛ̃, thing and ba, big.

the four cardinal points (south, west, east, and north), received twelve of the elements issued from the spirit. Then, with the help of the particles that came out of fã̀, he modeled lumps and mounds which gave shape to the earth.

But in the course of rising, the spirit had thrown upwards that which was later called fã̀ro (2). Faro, who was then no more than vibration,

192 2. The Bambara use either faro or fã̀ro, from fa (creation) or fã̀ (knowledge) in the ancient language. This double etymology indicates the closeness in their minds between the concepts of creation and knowledge (see p. 17). The suffix ro expresses the idea of a whole, a totality. Another etymology has been suggested by S. de Ganay, in Notes sur la théodicée bambara, p. 196. "...the words Fané (the name of a family of blacksmiths), Faro, fan (force), fara (stone), and fari (body) all have the same origin. Faro is the secret name of stone." This etymology

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is interesting in that it accentuates the ties which, in the Sudan, bind the Faro of the Bambara and the Bozo, the Nommo of the Dogon, and the blacksmiths. See M. Griaule, Dieu d'eau (passim).

772 helped the spirit with ten of its elements and with the radiance from
773 fa to build the sky along an oriented trajectory. Faro first went to the west, then the south, the east, and the north, thus determining the celestial cardinal points.

/14/ The sky is distinct from empty space, kene, which separates it from the earth and which is the product of the "yereyereli's shedding after it had given birth to the spirit." The sky, composed of seven parts placed one above the other, was completed before the earth which itself is also made up of seven corresponding parts.

773 Although he had received the larger share of the elements disgorged by the spirit, Pemba could not finish his work alone. When the sky was completed, the spirit blessed Faro, precipitated him in the form of water along the trajectory followed by Pemba during his descent. This water fell drop by drop from the seventh part of the sky to the seventh part of the earth into which it streamed to gain knowledge of the earth's foundations. As Faro descended vertically, he left a globule in space which became the spirit of the air, Teliko (1); on earth, he

1. From teli, to go quickly.

deposited a particle which formed the spirit Soba (2). As he dripped

2. Literally: so, house, ba, big.

between the mounds which made up the earth, he saw that the latter was not completed, so he filled the empty pockets with water, thus forming the hidden springs of today.

Then life appeared on earth. Faro, impregnated by the vibration which was potentially masculine and feminine, gave birth to twin daughters on a deserted hillock (3). As soon as they appeared, the

[823] 3. Naked hillocks, walawala, and clearings are the scene of rituals concerning the twins.

773 first grass, yayalé (1), grew around them, and scorpions, entrusted

1. Andropogon (Hyparrhenia) hirtus.

with protecting the twins, came forth (2). After a time, an abundant

2. The scorpion, weapon of the twins, attacks those who would harm them, for to attack a twin would be to offend Faro.

dew that had collected spread over the hillock and formed a spring from which a stream began to run. At its head, the fish kokoni (3)

3. Calrias senegalensis.

appeared, directing the first flow of fresh water to run on earth. He was soon followed by another fish of the same species which took Faro and his children on its back; the stream carried them to their water homeland. The first of Faro's daughters gave birth to twins, one of whom was a male. Faro sent his messenger, the swallow, to place the soul or vital force of the twins in the birth waters. As evidence he kept their doubles, dya, in water in order to protect them against all evil. Of these twins the Bozo were born, and, like Faro's twin daughters, they could live in water and converse with him (4). Faro

4. The male twin mated with his sister who gave birth to the Bozo; the daughter mated with a man descended from Mousso Koroni (see p. 65).

then created the fish /15/, which served as food for them, the crocodilians, and all the aquatic animals that people the seas and the running waters. Then he returned to the sky.

Of this first creation of earth and sky, it is said: "Pemba descended on earth; Pemba was the builder of all things. Faro's evidence came forth and spread over it; the great water (of Faro) descended and entered the eyes of the earth: in these places Faro made known his power" (5).

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5. pemba djigi na dugukolo ka, pemba dlala fẽwnye, faro ka šereya bwora o la, dyi ba djigini dona dugukolo nyena, yoro min faro ye a sebaya do o la. This text is recited in the course of the annual ceremonies of the Kworè (see p. 217).

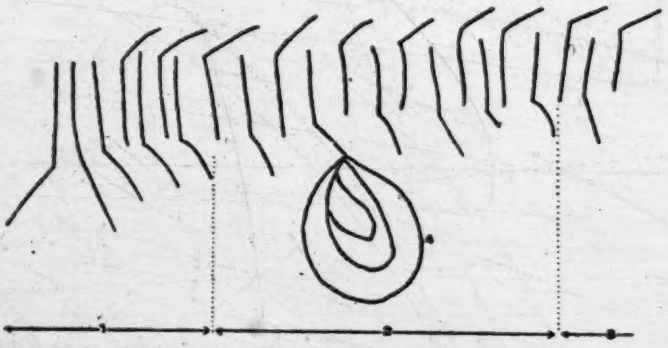

Fig. 2.—The twenty-two elements issued from the explosion of the spirit (4). They are divided into seven bõñuana, twelve bangini (2) and three jijini (3). This drawing was made on the sanctuaries of Komo. (An informant's drawing).

The first phase of the formation of the world is commemorated each year by a drawing traced on the sanctuary of the Komo: it represents the spirit, miri, and the twenty-two elements of creation (Fig. 2). The vertical lines are read from left to right; they are bent alternately above and below to indicate that they belong alternately to Pemba and Faro, and also signify that each of the elements is the first of a series engendered by it. The miri is drawn in the center in the shape of a slanted pocket, the image of "yereyereli's pregnancy." The old man in charge of the ritual recites as he draws: "Pemba and Faro have situated and organized the world, the sky above was secretly made by Faro with the help of the spirit; Pemba descended on earth and was known very quickly; the humans ask your help, yereyereli, my two hands are behind my back" (1). /16/

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1. pemba ni faro ye dyẽ dyokã ani dyẽ dyotyoko kẹ, sankaba dlala faro fe gundola miri deme ni ko la, pemba djigini dugukolo ka, a dõ teli yala, dyobe na warilike yereyereli, mbolo fla yenko.

Pemba's Reign

For seven years, Pemba was a whirlwind (1). Transformed into a

1. This part of the myth concerning the pembele was collected by S. de Ganay and published in the Journal de Psychologie normale et pathologique under the title: "Aspects de mythologie et de symbolique bambara. /Aspects of Bambara Mythology and Symbolism/." We have made a few changes in the text.

acacia seed, he moved about in space, carried by the wind and entraining the rain; finally, exhausted, he came to rest on the earth which hid him under a few lumps of dirt and enabled him to germinate; a tree, the balanza (2), grew but soon died of drought. There re-

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2. Acacia albida. The Dogon give an equally important place to the acacia albida in the prelude of creation. The first materialization of the world rotated between two thorns of the tree, placed symetrically point to point. Its shape was that of a rotating, flattened out truncated cone made from the wood of the same tree.

mained no more than a sort of rectangular board lying on the bare earth. It was called pembele, also ko kun, "the head of things."

Pemba was alone on the earth in the shape of a tree root which potentially contained the creation of animals and plants. Beneath

773 him his own decomposition collected. As he occasionally moved about in a whirlwind, weary of his solitude, he said to himself one day: "The dust of my tracks will dissipate my nostalgia." Having spoken these words, his tracks came together and the wind pushed them towards the mound of earth and rotting wood. He kneaded this mass with his saliva, thus incorporating into it a breath-soul, ni; he gave it a shape and an immaterial double, dya. However, as he distrusted it, he turned the double over to Faro, master of sky and the waters, guardian of the dya. Then Pemba laid himself down upon the shape for four days. On the fifth day, he heard, coming from beneath him a high-pitched feminine voice which said: "Get up, I am exhausted." "No," he replied, "first I will give you a name so that you may be my wife."

This creature had a head with long, pointed ears and the torso of an animal; the rest of the body was human except the tail. Until her fall, she retained that shape.

In order that she might become the womb of future beings, the repository of knowledge and the stimulant to Pemba's thoughts, she had to assure him of her total love. She promised him this and thereupon received the name of Muso koroni kundye, "little old woman with a white head,"—little, for she had issued from him; old, for she was an emanation for him and therefore his equal in age; white, /17/ because, coming from him, she was as pure as he. Thus named, she got up and became his wife. Although he did not enter her, she received multiple inseminations from him and in exchange he took his own sap back. She gave birth to plants and animals, the first of which was the panther. All that she engendered had a soul or vital force, ni, and a double, dya, similar to those which Pemba had deposited in her as he kneaded her with his saliva. At that time, no being was articulated (1).

1. Such beings with supple, non-articulated limbs are called masibadé.

773 824 The earth began to swarm with beings who appeared without order as they were born at random; they all went to worship Pemba as their creator, calling him god, Ngala. The latter wished to assert his complete domination over this chaotic work /of creation/; so he asked Mousso Koroni to plant him in the earth. He immediately took

773 824 root by his own power and became the first of all trees, the balanza, green in dry season and dry in rainy season, and it extended his power (1).

1. The balanza is not Pemba in his totality, which is spirit, force, and matter. It is Pemba's earthly metamorphosis and, more especially, the image of his fertile masculinity. Pemba took the shape of the balanza in order to continue his work of creation and to bring death on the earth.

773 The human beings born of Faro lived amidst the burning rocks and sought refuge under that tree, whose power was obvious to all since it needed no water to keep it green. They prayed to it and received from it directives for their lives. Since they were immortal, time did not exist. However, they figured their age according to their pilosity: at age 12, the public hair grew; at 22, the hair under the arms; at 36, the beard was black; at 52, the hair whitened. When he could count the four types of hair, his being was complete; but seven years later, he suddenly grew thin and lost his vitality, and his soul weakened; he was then an old man.

Men at that time knew no language and had no clothes. They lived naked and communicated to each other through gestures and grunts. At the instigation of Mousso Koroni, and in order to recognize [801] each other, they scarred their face with three or four lines, three being the sexual symbol of man (the penis and two testicles) and four that of woman (the four labia). In keeping with this, each person, according to his sex, would repeat his actions three or four times.

Men at that time received their food from /18/ the sky, thanks to the spirit Téliko, who, up in space, watched over Faro's waters. During the rainy season, he would send them stones from the seventh heaven containing karite nuts, si kolo. From these stones the women extracted oil which they ate with fruit. One day, during the dry season, a woman who had drawn oil from four nuts wiped her hands on the balanza under which she was seated alone. "This, I want," said the tree. From then on, all the women offered him oil and were imitated by men who later partook of the cult.

However, the balanza was no longer satisfied with only Mousso Koroni. It demanded that all the women give it their love. Therefore

113 they all had to mate with it, thus increasing its vitality and power, for it fed on their sap just as it had with its first female. The latter became overpowered by jealousy and brought ill will into all things; she refused to share and no longer came near it, thus denying it the love and faithfulness she had promised. She betrayed it, isolated herself, and, refusing to cooperate in the work of creation, began to disturb it. This was the origin of her fall, her poverty, and her hardship for the balanza cursed her for her betrayal and rejected her whenever she attempted to go back to it.

She then knew such nostalgia and despair that a kind of madness seized her. She chased about the heavens, the space, and the earth from west to north, from south to east, plunging pieces of wood into the ground as she had done for Pemba in the hope that they in turn would become balanza.

Mousso Koroni had maimed herself on the pembele at the time she had sexual relations with it. In the course of her voyage, she wished to inflict the same wounds on others; her fury drove her to circumcise and to excise all the human beings she encountered with her teeth and nails. The violence of her actions caused in her the appearance of the first menses. (1) At the same time, she revealed to men all

> 1. Dyoli tumbi bo muso koroni, bolokoli gale ke to a fe na ni ma sone ye. "Blood came out of Mousso Koroni the moment she circumcised with her nails and teeth."

that Pemba had taught her and which should have remained secret; she communicated to all she touched the impurity of her betrayal. At her touch, the earth became impure and has remained so until today (2).

> 2. See p. 82.

Pemba vainly pursued Mousso Koroni throughout the universe in an attempt to reclaim that which he had given her: power and /19/ knowledge. Faro, at his request, chased her in turn from east to south, from north to west; he caught up with her, vanquished her, and attempted to submit her to her creator. But she refused, declared herself free, and thus introduced disorder into creation: evil, unhappiness, and death were brought into the world by her.

113 After a long life of misery and madness, Mousso Koroni died, abandoned and anguished, without ever having seen the light. But men gained something from her misery: her efforts to keep from starvation with the origin of the agricultural techniques that she taught (1).

1. The part of the myth pertaining to the origins of agriculture will be related in detail by S. de Ganay, in Techniques et rites de l'agriculture chez les Bambara, /Agricultural Techniques and Rituals among the Bambara/, (in press).

During that time, life was multiplying on earth; the tree engendered beings with each of the women with whom it mated.

In the meantime other beings appeared on earth—spirits of the air who had become visible, having acquired bodies and become transformed, through contact with the impure earth, into men called mahalakillen (2). They had supple inarticulated limbs and were

2. Literally: fallen person.

similar to the beings brought into the world by Mousso Koroni Koundye. But the multiplication of living beings it wanted to dominate caused the balanza to seek an increase in its own strength, drawing it first from the genital secretion of women. As this became insufficient, a more powerful sustenance was revealed to it. An old man who was to marry a virgin one day lost his strength and could not consummate the sexual act. The young girl mated with the tree, which, having deflowered her, was covered with blood and became warm. The purpose of this warmth was to repel those women who had previously presented themselves to it; it signified that the tree wanted something besides their genital secretion. Seized with fear, women practices divining rites in order to learn its wish: the answer was that it wished blood.

The men, not knowing how to satisfy its desire, asked the eldest among them, who was a diviner, to put the dried blood of the virgin into the tree trunk. He first dampened the stained spot with water and rubbed the tree. On the third day, as he was doing this work,

113 one of his hands caught on the rough bark; a vein in his wrist opened and his blood ran. After this, men offered the blood of their veins twice a year to the tree which would absorb the strength to regenerate itself. In exchange for this offering, the tree agreed to rejuvenate men when they reached the critical age of fifty-nine. But, in return, the tree required that the wives of all men become his wives. /20/ The power of the tree and the youthfulness of men resulted from this continuous exchange, but it was possible only through the medium of those women who were used as a tribute.

The first blood offering of men took place at the begging of the dry season. Grouped around the tree, with the eldest in command, they opened the veins of their right wrists without murmur or complaint and in the midst of chants, they sprinkled the trunk with blood. To give the blood of the right hand meant to give half of one's body and to entrust to the tree one's work and one's double, dya. As soon as the blood stopped spurting, that is, as soon as it seemed to have lost its strength, the wrists were bound with fibers of da, and the wounds healed without leaving any scars.

The stain of each offering was noted by the elder who learned to identify people according to the color of their blood. Then each man, his hands behind his back, licked the place he had bled in order to take back the blood to which the tree had given new life, leaving in the trunk the strong and dangerous element it previously contained.

During this ceremony the old men who wished to regain their youth assembled around the tree. Each one, in turn, climbed to the top and opened the veins of his left wrist, thus surrendering his last strength. Then he climbed down and the young men who were present pulled out the hair of his body, one by one, beginning with the public hair and continuing with the hair of the underarm, the beard, and the head. They finished off by taking out the body hair. The man who endured this was not to groan or cry out, but to sing in order to give himself courage, because suffering stoically borne was necessary to rejuvenation. His entire body was then beaten by the young men, the beating started with the nape of his neck; he fainted and became once more a seven year old child. The adolescents blew into his veins to activate his lungs and insufflated him with water so as to replace the blood he had lost.

The eldest son of the rejuvenated old man became the head of the family but could not inherit the women who, according to the pact,

113 belonged to the tree. In addition, the balanza required that the fourth daughter born in each family be entirely consecrated to it. Every virgin had to be deflowered by it on the eve of her marriage, and the act was ritually performed with the hand of one of the women belonging to the tree in such a way that the blood would run onto the trunk.

The cycle of births that followed these various matings was regulated as follows: when a woman's husband reached the age of /21/ fifty-two, she continued to have sexual relations with the tree. She gave birth to all sorts of animals and plants. After her rejuvenation, which occurred without ritual or suffering when she reached her fifty-ninth year, she regained her virginity (1). She was deflowered by the

1. It would seem that women obtained rejuvenation in return for their genital secretion and menstrual blood which they constantly gave the tree.

tree and gave birth to an animal or a plant, after which, having reunited with her husband, she would again engender men. When her husband grew old, she returned to the tree and the cycle began again.

The tree also demanded of women their menstrual blood and all births took place near it. When men learned to work stone and made their first axes, the tree ordered them to carve wooden phalli which they inserted into its trunk. The shape given to these objects varied according to a woman's vagina and age. The women feared these painful matings but had to submit to them without a tear, because the tree drew not only its strength from them as in the old days, but also a pleasure unknown to it before. Its strength grew still greater and its pleasure reached a peak when the balanza received the blood of the first virgin deflowered by one of the wooden phalli.

When the blood sacrifices were organized, the tree instructed men in other things. It taught them, in particular, to make fire by rubbing two stones together; to thank it they cut the veins of their right hands and gave it their blood.

The power of the balanza was then at its height. But the way in which it abused its creatures brought about its downfall. Indeed, at that time, men as well as women were not only exhausted from giving blood, but, because of a constant increase in population, they were dying of hunger. One evening a woman fainted as she passed by

773 a field of wild tomatoes. When she came to Faro, who was then in the earthly waters, suggested to her the idea of eating fruit. In her body, the fruit was transformed into blood and she regained her strength and got up. She went to bathe in the Niger, a region where famine had become so bad that sand was the only food. There Faro seized her, sliced off her nose and her navel, and opened her belly. He ate the red pulp which he found there. He counted the seeds of the fruit and found the number to be a multiple of seven. Each /22/ tomato carried within it both blood and the principle of duality (3 plus 4), both of these being the fundamental elements that made up the human being. Faro placed the principle of life in the tomato: men and women, informed of this transformation, ate the fruit to regain strength and continue feeding the balanza which, in return, rejuvenated them.

But Faro was opposed to this increase in power. He found it unfair and excessive that the tree enjoy both the domination of the world and sexual pleasure. He also considered the tree his tributary to some extent since water and the tomato, both of which belonged to him, were indispensable to the life of men and to the regeneration of their blood. He therefore made the tree understand the conditions under which he would continue to dispense water. He demanded that the tree stop the procreation of beings through women's mating with wood, and reserved for himself the power to procreate with the tomato as intermediary.

The balanza knew it was going to be vanquished; it foresaw that men were going to betray it and that their worship would now be given to Faro since water was essential to their subsistence and to the multiplication of plants. It knew also that this betrayal would bring about death, but that Faro would take over in his name the work of creation.

Nevertheless it uprooted itself and went to meet with Faro. "The struggle was as bitter as their words, as hard as their hatred," but victory was Faro's.

Death

The women of the vanquished, who gave birth to the animals and plants, were the first to leave it after seven days and it called them back in vain. They went to live near the river; thereafter, without

773 intervention of any kind, they gave birth after drinking water in which Faro had secretly mixed tomato juice. They offered thanks by giving him three or four tomatoes, depending upon the sex of the child.

After the women, the men, too, gave up worshiping the tree. Instead of seeking wood elsewhere, as they had been in the habit of doing, they began to burn the twigs that fell under the balanza in order to maintain their fire, the fire it had given them.

The tree cursed them. They were thus preyed upon by illness and bad feelings: vindictiveness, hatred, jealousy. The wounds they /23/ inflicted upon themselves in order to give blood and regain their youth no longer healed and became infected.

773 825 A few among them tried to remedy this new state of affairs. Eight of the eldest men went up to the balanza and, in spite of the heat it gave off in order to repel them, they made incisions on their tongues and offered it their blood. The tree was surprised and first gave out a sort of sigh, for it appreciated the sacrifice. Finally it spoke to them and announced the coming of death. But because of their submission and the sacrifice they had consented to, it transformed them into birds, tatugu kononi (literally: little birds of fire). In order to accomplish this, it demanded that they rub their backs against the tree trunk until all their blood was gone. The men cried out in pain in the process, but just as they were about to die, their souls were transformed into birds. Their flesh and skin penetrated into the tree; their bones mingled with the white bark and the marrow became the red fruit which, from that day on, ripened on the tree. Since that time, the "human flesh" which is the wood of the balanza is rarely put to profane use. These first eight elders transformed into birds were subsequently venerated by men (1).

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1. In particular by all blacksmiths. Since their transformation the birds tatugu kononi supposedly live near the balanza and respect a certain number of taboos: they must not separate but must live communally outside of villages. They are responsible for fire; though incapable of lighting it, they have the power, by their very presence, to keep it up or to put it out. A twig of damp

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straw bursts into flames when one lights it while pronouncing their name. They also protect woman potters against burns. They are considered impure because of the earth in which they dig holes and because of the fire which is itself impure.

773 As the tree blossomed and bore fruit, the sacrifices, of which it was still the object, increased its yield: leaves and fruit contained the blood of men. The latter began to eat the fruit for it was appetizing and sweet. They also cut branches to feed their animals. The tree remained silent.

But soon men took advantage of it. One man climbed to its summit, cut off all its buds, and carried them away. Those who came afterwards were terrified to find the tree mutilated. The culprit was terrified by his own action and ran away to Mandé, but there the avenging force (nyama) that pursued him caught up with him and he dropped dead.

The people of Mandé, not knowing that they had broken a taboo and being ignorant of death, sheltered him, thinking he was asleep. They tried to feed him and rubbed the corpse with sorrel and oil. Thanks to these ministrations the body /24/ kept for a certain time, but at the end of ten days, it rotted. The force (nyama) it exuded attacked other men who in turn also died.

The deceased's parents came to fetch the body. They ate the flesh because since the arrival of death, the thunder stones that fell from the sky no longer contained karite nuts and they were beginning to starve. They carried away the dead man's bones.

When they returned to the tree, it ordered them to grind the bones and rub its mutilated branches with powder. It told them that from then on it would be useless to give it their blood; they would no longer be rejuvenated and they would all know death.

At the sound of these words, three men fell; four women who unexpectedly came by suffered the same fate. The seven corpses rotted around the tree that had taken their lives. This was the last sacrifice.

The tree announced that it was forsaking men but that it would continue to give the red fruit representing their blood poured over him in the past. And since then, the tree follows an annual cycle contrary to that of other plants: during the winter season it loses its

T13 strength along with its leaves and fruit. But it blossoms in the dry season, after the harvest, just like a well-fed person who is afraid of nothing because the harvest is in. As it carries within itself its own sacrifices, it requires nothing of human beings.

After having been forsaken, men in desperation went up to a torrent to implore the invisible. But for two years they received no answer. They began to waste away and their patriarch went up to the tree to obtain its forgiveness. He prayed in vain and had to return to the water. Thereupon he heard the voice of Faro and the power of that first word caused him to faint. A little water brought him back to consciousness but he was terrified by a black shadow. Reaching out with his arms he prayed: "The tree has put darkness between you and us." Then the shadow became white and the coolness of Faro entered his body. He went to fetch his people and Faro instructed them, saying: "I will give the necessary rain for farming, as well as the springs, the ponds, the torrents, and a great river, the Niger. But remember that all water is holy and must be revered. I cannot eliminate death, but I will compensate for it." And he taught them speech and their own language.

Faro said to the first of the eight oldest men, a patriarch thereafter known as kumabana (1): "You are going to die." Eight /25/ days later the old man, feeling his end near, went to the edge of the torrents and said to those who surrounded him and who listened respectfully:

1. "End of speech." This word also means "there are no more words" in the sense of "outside of these words there are no others." Kumabana had complete knowledge.

"We did not have the power of speech; through Faro, we have received it. And now we must die. I did not expect this suffering, this sadness: all of you will know the same."

An old man questioned him; he no longer responded. Thinking that they might bring him back to life, the men threw the body into the river where it sank. The second old man, wishing to find it, threw himself in after it. But his body, with nose and navel cut up, floated to the surface of the water which became covered with

●173 blood. The body was then taken and placed in the crack of a baobab tree. Eight days later, the third old man drowned while bathing; the water turned red at the place of his fall.

When the fourth old man saw this, he concluded that Faro demanded sacrifices. He became the first priest of the cult which he established and which men have honored since that day.

Since this period each of the animal and vegetable species reproduced itself, and the random births of the first ages ceased.

The women, impregnated by Faro, gave birth to humans only. Moreover, they no longer gave birth to single beings as in the days of the balanza, but to twins in the image of those the spirit had engendered to populate the waters of the earth.

Twin births were the rule for a long time until the day men betrayed Faro. Then the spirit of the air, Téliko, decided to take his turn at controlling creation.

"The breath of living beings is mine," he said; "all men's joys come from me through the wind."

"Without me, nothing can live," answered Faro, "for to breathe one must drink; water is indispensable to life."

Deprived of air and water, men wasted away. They attempted to mediate, but Faro refused, "for the body of Téliko, in contact with impure earth, is hot and worn out by the wind." Nevertheless, Téliko, out of pride, decided to take his turn at visiting the boundaries of the world, and men, believing he would be the winner, abandoned Faro to follow him. The latter, sure of his own power, waited for his adversary to attempt the crossing of the seas. At that moment, Faro dashed him against a rock, depriving him of his virility and breaking his right arm which was unarticulated like those of all the creatures of that period.

/26/ After Téliko had recognized his defeat, Faro adjudged men guilty. He punished them for their betrayal but did not forsake them as the balanza had done. First he provided them with articulations necessary for the manual labor they were forced to perform from then on in order to survive. He eliminated the rule of double births and women gave birth to single beings, twins being reserved for rare, privileged individuals. But he replaced twins by the double dya who, from his home in the water, was entrusted with watching over the living and in particular with helping women in childbirth (1).

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1. In her Notes sur la théodicée Bambara, Mrs. S. de Ganay has given a first version of the creation in which Koni (alias Pemba), conceived of as the only creator, gives birth to "female twins in the divine substance," Mousso Koroni and Faro respectively, the latter seen in his female aspect. This version is in line with Bambara thought which sees creation as founded on the principle of duality.

The version presented here is of interest because it is absolutely comparable to the Dogon creation myth and takes into account the identity of representations among both tribes. Indeed, in the Dogon myth, creative thought (the god Amma), having formed the "egg of the world," splits it into two placentae (me), each containing one of the Nommo twins, bearers of his word charged respectively with the creation of sky and earth. The same is true of Faro and Pemba (see p. 31). But the Nommo of the earth, having lost his female double, was transformed into an animal desperately seeking his double. As a result, disorder was introduced and the Nommo of the sky was charged with putting the confusion into order. To do this, he recognized the universe, reclaiming from the other Nommo the words Amma had entrusted him with. Among the Bambara, the same roles of Pemba, Mousso Koroni, and Faro are found.

To elaborate on this, Pemba and the balanza have their counterparts in the yurugu (Vulpes pallida) and the senge (Acacia albida), Mousso Koroni in the female being Yasigui, twin of yurugu, now represented by a dignitary of the Mask Society, the yasigine. Yasigui, like Mousso Koroni, revealed the words of the creator, that is, the language of Sigui. She circumcised and excised men and women and

773 171 821

taught certain agricultural techniques. In both tribes, the same star, Sirius (called sigi toto by the Dogon; sigi doto by the Bambara), represents them. The androgynous Faro is comparable in all ways to the Nommo, the universal monitor, custodian of the word and of life. The yurugu and the Nommo made voyages similar to those of Pemba and Faro. In particular, at the time of their descent on earth, the yurugu, and later the Nommo, used an "ark," toro, whose counterparts are Pemba's wood pembele and Faro's ark kuru, described by certain initiates (see M. Griaule, L'Arche du monde chez les populations nigériennes. /The ark of the world among Nigerian peoples/.

For both tribes, man "the seed of the world," is the image of the cosmos. The exact role of the seed of the Acacia albida does not appear clearly in the two myths, but in both cases, it is considered to be a first aborted creation.

Faro's Reign

773 Faro, having vanquished the balanza and overcome Téliko, took over the creation himself. He reorganized the whole universe and established the order under which it still functions today. /27/ He spread his word and his light; he named and classified all things: "All things (of the universe) are under the domination of Faro; eight hundred transformations are in his power" (1).

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1. Fêw be be faro ka se kono, yelemani ba kele be a la a fe.

The number 800 which is "the end of the count," here expresses the infinite. In the so-called "eastern number system," now

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used by most Sudanese, the principal units are 1, 80, 800, etc. Ten remains a secondary unit for counting from 1 to 79 and is combined with 80 for units of the other orders.

There is also the so-called "Mandé" number system, the principal units of which are 1, 60, 600, etc. in which 10 remains a secondary unit for the count from 1 to 59, and combines with 60 for units of a higher order.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the Bambara number system is vigesimal and reflects the concept of the person as identified with the 20 fingers of his hands and feet, and spiritually endowed with two souls of the opposite sex, each of which represents the number 10. If one follows this line of thought, 10 is the unit parexcellence (see p. 213, n. 2). The two counts, 60 and 80, in Sudanese metaphysics, are complementary in the sense that one, 60, is male (60 is three times the person) and the other, 80, is female (80, four times the person) (for a discussion on 3 and 4, see p. 19). In the tribes where generally only the count based on 80 is used, the count based on 60 is still used today in certain rituals (principally among the Dogon).

773 To carry through his plan, Faro undertook a voyage of reconnaissance to the ends of the world in order to name the cardinal points.

He first visited the east, and all the beings who lived there recognized his power and his wisdom. Comparing the luminous whiteness of this region to that of hair discolored by age, he gave it the name of koro, old, a word which also indicates that it was his first stop. He made the east the seat of death.

He then went to the west. As it was dark there, he named the inhabitants klebi maw, "people of the fallen sun." He made the

773 west, klebi, the seat of customs and of good and beautiful things.

He then started off in the direction of the north, taking eight epochs to cross the spaces and the depths. He named the north baba, "great river," for the distance was great, the water deep, and the area difficult. In the north, which he reached in the ninth epoch, he established the seat of his control and that of all royalty.

He then went to the south where evil creatures who had listened to Mousso Koroni and followed her advice spoke a language they had stolen (1). The tried to resist Faro, but he destroyed great numbers

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1. The Dogon have a similar notion of the theft of the language. See p. 47, n. 1.

of them. Although the survivors submitted to him, he made their domain the seat of impurity and named it /28/ bani, "little river," to emphasize their weakness and their shameful failure.

The itinerary was measured in palms, sibiri, the unit of measurement being 22 palms (2). The distance separating the cardinal points,

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2. sibiri nye, literally "eye of the palm." The Bambara palm is a length obtained with an open hand, from the extremity of the thumb to the extremity of the middle finger.

the height of the sky and the depth of the earth were measured in the same way.

During the same period he determined the seasons and created the regular alternation of day and night to replace the premordial darkness. Having measured space, he created time.

Faro then placed himself in the center of the universe: still actuated by a vibratory movement, he traversed in a spiral turning from right to left up to the outer boundaries, "where there is no more than a trembling of the surface." Then he returned along the same route, going from left to right in order to "place himself at the central point (3) whence he distinguished between beings and things" (4).

3. It is said of this act, faro tyema yera; or faro sigi yoro seleke nani tyela. "Faro

T73 sat down in the middle of the cardinal point."

4. A ye klali ke.

The first sky, kaba noro, is less pure than the others and the impure traces of Mousso Koroni's passage, in the form of clouds, have remained there. From that sky comes the wind which Pemba had placed there while pursuing her.

But the second sky, kaba dye, "the white sky," is fresh and already in Faro's power. It is the seat of the souls (ni) of men and animals. The Kwore spirits live there and strive to permit the passage of rain as it falls on earth from the seventh heaven.

The third, kaba fĩ, "the black sky," is the resting place of all spirits, and the fourth, kaba mana ("shedding of the sky," is the mirror of the other three. There, Faro does his daily "accounting" of the world.

In the fifth sky, koblekaba, "the red sky," Faro hands out judgments on those who have broken the laws. It is the sky of struggles, battles and victories—the sky to which the king offered sacrifices before going to war. It is also the sky of blood, fire, and hot and harmful winds.

In the sixth sky, suna kaba, the secrets of the world situation are kept (1). As its name indicates, it is also the sky of sleep. All the

1. Dyẽ dyoka gundo be sunakaba la.

souls of spirits and living beings sleep there, each in an allotted place. [827] Sleep /29/ is a purification of the soul and dreams are the directives given to it by Faro. Fainting spells, insomnia, and illness are the result of disturbances in the displacement of souls during sleep.

The seventh sky, wolõ fla kaba, is the site of Faro's reign and the seat of power, royal power in particular. From this sky, the realm of purifying water, Faro sends forth over the world the beneficial rain that brings a soul to the grain.

[821] The sun, to which Faro "holds the rope," penetrates the first sky in the morning and crosses all the others successively until evening when it skinks into the seventh. It is the god Pemba who, weary of his pursuit of Mousso Koroni, turns red. The stars are his pores, dilated by effort.

773 Empty space, or tyema, which separates the sky from the earth, remains under the domination of Téliko. It is the domain of air, the winds and insects.

773 823 The earth is divided into seven parts which correspond to the seven heavens and are as follows: (1) dugukolo, earth; (2) dugukolo fi, black earth; (3) dugukolo dye, white earth; (4) dugukolo mana, shedding of the earth; (5) dugukolo bele, "stone of the earth"; (6) dugukolo noro, soft earth; (7) dugukolo wolofla, the seventh earth.

On earth, Faro first created deep watery holes, the abysses of the sea and the rivers which he haunts. He himself dug the first well, the ponds, and the bed of torrents. He established the schedule of the rains which fall from the seventh part of heaven to the seventh part of the earth and constitute the purification and reparation of cosmic disorders.

773 825 824 He then classified living beings. In the east, wild and domestic animals, each group headed respectively by the lion and the horse; in the west, the birds; in the north, the fish with the miri (1) at their

1. Micralestes acutidens.

head, the sauria, and the batrachia; in the south, all plant life which he divided into three categories (2), indicating the purifying and

2. These are respectively: herbs, bin, headed by the narakata (Digitaria digitata); plants, fura, the first being the sindya (Cassia siberiana), and trees, dyiri, divided into three categories headed respectively by the karite, the baobab, and the nere (Parkia biglobosa).

medicinal power of each.

773 Men were also named and classified and the races distributed according to the quality of the blood into which Faro inscribed the destiny of each. He determined the castes, beginning with the slaves.

He then decided each one's foods and, to protect /30/ the species from destruction, he indicated the forbidden foods, animal and vegetable, which each category of beings had to respect.

773 Finally, he occupied himself with agriculture. In particular, he gave men, through the intermediary of the blacksmiths, the eight cereal grains that had been created simultaneously with man but had remained hidden in the sky (1). The eight grains became the basis

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1. A myth parallel to this can be found among the Dogon (see M. Griaule, Dieu d'eau). It makes the Bambara blacksmith into a civilizing hero, a metamorphosis of Faro, descended from the sky in an ark, kuru, and holding in his hand a mass containing the eight cereal grains. See M. Griaule, L'Arche du monde chez les populations nigériennes; S. de Ganay, Notes sur la théodicée bambara, pp. 194-196.

for subsistence and are fundamental to the human being who carried the symbol of them on his collar-bone (2).

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2. The eight grains are as follows: saño, small millet (Pennicillaria spicata); keninge, large millet (Sorghum gambicum); kende, red millet (Sorghum magaritiferum); fini, fonio (Digitaria exilis); syõ, beans (Vigna maniculata); tikaninkuru, peas; malo, rice. The names of the seeds vary, but the same symbols occur among the Dogon. In the Bozo myth, the collar-bone is the receptacle for eight fish, represented by symbols on the forward part of canoes. See G. Dieterlen. Les Correspondances cosmo-biologiques chez les Soudanais /Cosmic-Biological Correspondences among the Sudanese/.

Everything on earth is represented in the water: living beings by their doubles or witnesses, dya; plants and minerals by an exact replica, which enabled Faro to exert constant control over the existence and actions of the beings placed in his power.

He put spirits as his representatives everywhere in charge of watching over the universal order.

The Future Waters

773 The order of the universe prevails in space and time: the present order of things is but one phase thereof. When the "first running waters" covered the ground, Faro permitted only the primordial water to spread out; twelve waters remained hidden and they will rush forth and submerge the earth when he gives the order. The words they contain will be revealed and the "world to come" as thought out by yo will be realized.

Meanwhile, in the expectation of these "future waters," men must provide themselves with objects that will save them; the Bozo and some Bambara have canoes, shepherds have their gourds, spinners their spindles, and women their wooden stools (1). The coming /31/

[192] 1. It is significant that kuru (canoe), kuruni (spindle), and kuruni (stool) come from the same root. The word kuru designates the original globule in which Pemba descended, and which later became the wood pembele in the shape of a trough; it also designates the case or ark used by the mythical blacksmith, bearer of the nutritive seeds. See p. 53, n. 1. The word kuru [171] should be compared to koro which, in the Dogon language, has the general meaning of case, box, wooden receptacle, trough, and canoe, and which also designates, among these people, the vessel in which the blacksmith descended. See M. Griaule. L'Arche du monde chez les populations nigériennes, p. 117, n. 3.

of the waters is represented by a drawing on these objects as well as on a number of other everyday tools (Fig. 3).

773 524 This drawing serves as the framework for a game, the sumangolo, which the Bambara of all ages and both sexes play in order to "contribute to the progress of the world."

This game bears the name of the ancestor Soumangolo who traveled throughout the universe to find out and reveal to men "the

●773 524 location and disposition of the waters" (dyi walew and dyi kono few). During his voyage, "he was unable to reach the central springs of the sky, " and that is why they have remained unknown to men. /32/ But he visited "the waters of the cardinal angles" from which there emanates a vapor that determines the seasons and the temperatures. Then he studied "the waters of the cardinal sides" and asked Faro to let them

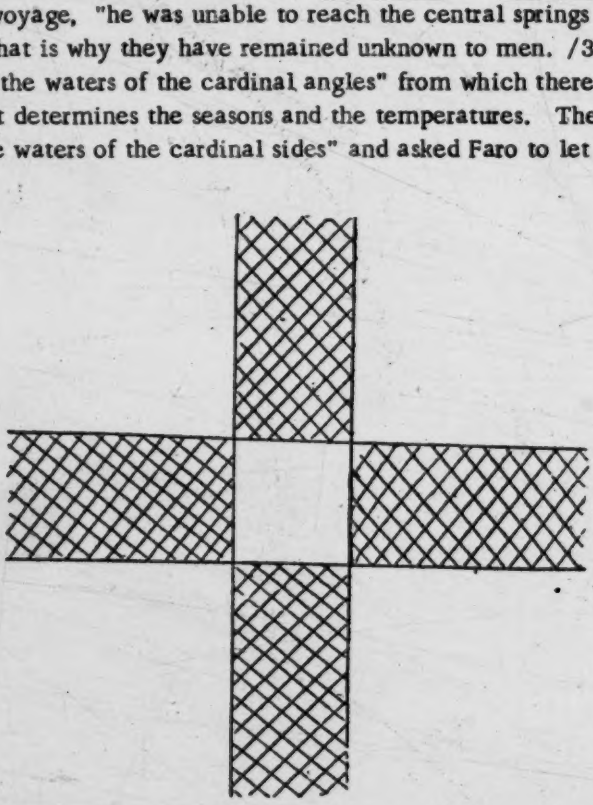

Fig. 3.—The arrival of the "twelve future waters." The central square represents the world and its four cardinal points, the arms of the cross, and the expansion of the waters. This drawing is made on a great number of objects and tools.

stream over the earth. He crossed them in order to explore them and instruct men about them. It is said: "Soumangolo of creation has shown to people and things the ponds, rivers and old ponds" (1).

1. Dali sumangolo ye ko, ba, ko koro kono ko dyira ma ni few la.

● 713 The game consists in the player crossing the three waters that come
524 from each of the cardinal sides. (1) The drawing represents /33/

1. See Fig. 4. This figure is drawn on the ground: the central square represents the universe and the branches of the cross are the waters emanating from the cardinal sides and divided within each group into three parts.

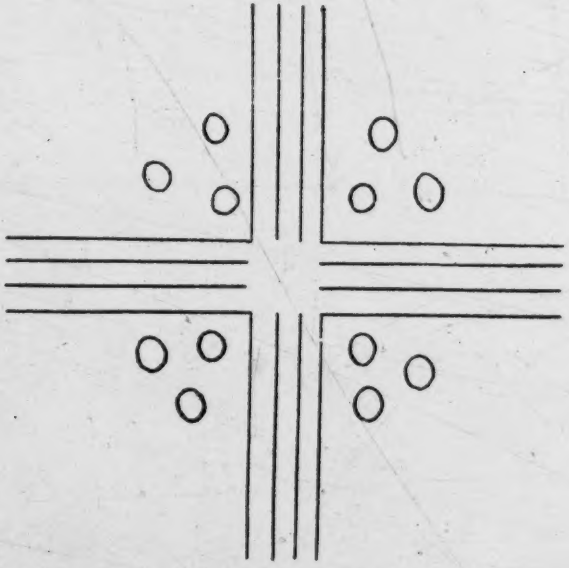

Fig. 4.—Game of the sumangolo, symbolizing the "arrival of the twelve future waters."

Three or four pebbles, depending on the sex of the player, are placed in the angles.

The player turns his back on the drawing and sings: "The little man has left the dance; the little man, the bad man has left the dance; another has not danced; may the difficulty of the water cease (tyeni bwora do la; tyeni, tyendyugu bwora do la; tye were te do ke nin kelenko; dyi geleya ka ta). He then names the three parts of water in the branch of the cross, while his partner

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points them out successively with his finger, saying: "cross the pond" (ko tike sumangolo), "cross the river" (ba tike sumangolo), "Soumangolo's descent is over" (sumangolo yigi bana). The partner removes the pebble immediately adjacent to the branch pointed to and asks: "Is this it?" (nin wa?). The player must answer: "Yes! Soumangolo." The game is again taken up in the same way at the starting point. When the onlooker places his finger on the now empty space, he asks: "Is this it?". The player must answer: "No! Soumangolo." The second pebble is removed and, to the same question, the player must then answer: "Yes! Soumangolo." Then follows the same chant, the same mimicry to get at the third pebble, which is also removed. The game is started over again in the same way, at the same starting point, and the second branch of the cross is reached. This continues until the four groups of pebbles placed in the angles are eliminated. The player who has answered without making a mistake is the winner; supposedly he has victoriously crossed "the twelve future waters."

The immediate effect of this game is to place the winner in a favorable position: his earnings increase; his enterprises succeed. But this is not all: it represents a cosmogonic operation of a high order. In the old days, sumangolo was [789] played to bring about rain in times of drought; every person playing it today contributes to the actual functioning of the universe as well as to the realization of future times awaited by men. In certain villages the ancestor Soumangolo is [796] celebrated yearly by a hearty feast at which millet beer is drunk and all day long the villagers play the game bearing his name.

The sumangolo is part of a series of figures, sometimes geometrical, which serve as the base for cosmogonic games of semi-ritual character such as the one described above.

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[524] both the waters that flowed over the earth in the past and those that will spread over the world when Faro orders them (Fig. 4).

While awaiting that day, Faro continues his work. Taking the spiral route originally followed at the time of the reorganization of the world, every four centuries he travels about, inspecting the confines of the world, and then returns to the central point whence he surveys and governs the universe.

Chapter 2

The Representations

776 /34/ The duality of glã, in the microcosm that is man by his twin souls (ni and dya), is projected into the universe in the form of the pair, sky-earth, originally formed by the splitting of the spirit in two. The pair is represented by two supernatural powers, Faro and Pemba, to whom the principal Bambara cults are addressed.

Pemba is both spirit, strength, and matter. He is actually represented by an engraved piece of wood, symbol of plank originally responsible for the creation of all living things on earth. Theoretically, each family has one.

Faro, master of the word, reigns both in the sky and in the waters, which are the earthly reflection of the sky. In his capacity as master of the word and reorganizer of the universe, custodian of life, and guardian of souls, Faro, light and vibration, reigns in the seventh heaven. As master of the waters, he is described by the Bambara as a living being who has a body and is subject to metamorphosis. Yet to the initiated, he remains first and foremost a higher spirit, detached from contingencies and free in the exercise of the sovereign power conferred on him.

In order to understand fully the spirit of the Bambara religion, it is necessary to examine all the representations of these powers (1).

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114 1. A few authors have summarily described Faro, in particular, L. Tauxier in Religion bambara (pp. 142-145), in

the daily movement of the sun "which unfolds until evening." The regularity of the rays symbolizes order and the classification of beings and things by Faro. The /41/ ends of the straw sprigs forming the spiral must remain free: they represent the infinite extension of Faro's realm and power. The hat is also a mask "which hides Faro's invisible face and through which he watches over the world" (1).

1. Today, a basket of considerably higher dimensions is made and used by women (See pl. I, b).

The headgear yugu was formerly reserved for the king, who wore it under a turban. Certain deserving old men were also permitted to keep it. The rituals of making and wearing this headdress attest to the importance attributed to it. In particular, when an old man was suspected of having committed a serious offense, his hat was pierced with four holes representing the four cardinal points. He was then made to wear it, thus submitting him to Faro's judgment; if found guilty, he died.

As the spirit of the waters, Faro is supposed to belong to the white race and his body to be half albino flesh and half copper (pl. I, c).

A myth relates how his physical being was formed.

When Faro caused the streaming waters to descend on earth, he manifested himself for a long time only by his voice. He had no body, and since he needed appropriate matter to achieve one, he bided his time in the waters of the sea.

The winged spirit Téliko, who had the body of an albino, wished one day, in his arrogance and jealousy, to cross the world in order to know it and to dominate it. Faro, warned by the dogfish, decided to seize his enemy's body to complete his own. The albino, who always flew, fed on his own substance. He chewed his own flesh and his bones were soon bare; the marrow came out of them. It turned into red copper which fell into the sea and nourished Faro.

While Téliko descended to the water level, the dogfish that was watching him sang in order to attract him. The albino, aware of the danger, climbed back to the highest heaven, attempting to continue his flight and to reach the ends of the world. But he quickly lost strength and after his dya had fallen into the waters, his body was

seized by Faro who, after giving the genitals to the dogfish, completed his own physical being. His head and torso were made of the albino's flesh; his tail was of copper, as were his breasts, the "essential organs that fed and revived the world."

Faro's head can be compared to that of a white woman: his eyes are black and piercing; his hair is black, straight and long like a horsetail.

/42/ His ears are two holes with no outer ear, but are protected by two fins. Two necklaces of copper and gold hang from his neck and act as receivers, enabling him to hear all sounds and all words: the copper necklace reports idle talks of little importance; the gold one, secret conversations and powerful words. Faro puts all that the receivers collect in his fins, which are also the mirror reflecting all that his eyes have seen, both good or bad. He looks, shuts his eyes, and puts out his tongue; the images penetrate into his fins and classify themselves according to the regular movements of his tail. Thus, images and sounds are chronologically inscribed and can be brought before him at any moment "like a card pulled out of a file." In this way he knows to what use he can put things and events.

Both his hands—the right one male and the other female—and the end of his tail are webbed. Without any apparent sex, the preeminence of the feminine shape usually attributed to him recalls that he once impregnated himself in order to give birth to twin girls at the time the first waters streamed onto the earth.

Faro's appearance, which is linked to the problem of his origin, has been the object of legends and tales among the people. While these have attracted the scholar's attention, they present a serious problem. The legends are truncated, episodic, and often childish versions of an imposing myth, which is perfectly constructed and often expresses a dogma.

Two examples will be given of legends whose only interest here is to suggest further research into myths forming the framework for collective symbols. One of these legends is Peul /Fulani/, and the other Touareg /Tuareg/.

1. At a time when the Niger was but a narrow, deep river, a pregnant Peul woman asked some Bozo fishermen, who usually ferried people on request, to take her across the stream. At first they refused,

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using her pregnancy as an excuse. As she insisted, they took her in their canoe, left her on the other shore, and went away.

As soon as she had landed, she was seized with pains of her labor. The water of the river dried up at the point where it had been deepest. A voice came out of it, advising the woman to bear her child there. She went down into the pit after having left her clothes on the shore.

From her womb there first came forth milk, honey, and precious stones (lulu) which dropped onto the milk and honey as though on /43/ a straw mat. The woman was writhing with pain: the child finally appeared feet first and fell on the stones. His hands and feet were webbed.

As the water began to reappear, she attempted to get away, but in vain. Her husband, who had run up to the river's edge and had found her clothing there, saw her appear three times holding the child above the waters. She then disappeared, carried away by the current. Both she and the child became Faro spirits.

2. The village of Siyango, located fifteen kilometers from Nyono, has a very deep, perennial natural well called ala kolo faro, Faro of the well of god, "or Mbata dyi," "water of Mbata." No one drinks its water. At the beginning of creation, a woman named Mbata lived alone and without water. She gave birth to twins. Exhausted and dying of thirst, she came out of the cave and, going down to the edge of the sand, prayed that God let her die if she could have no water. A spirit appeared and said to her: "God will entrust all waters to you; but he will first prepare you a home." A pit having been formed and filled with water, the woman stepped inside and was transformed into Faro. She then took her two children in with her; one became a male spirit and the other, a female spirit.

The pit extended underground through a kind of tunnel and Mbata, who had followed it down, came out again with so much water that the Niger was created.

The water of this well was soon forbidden to human beings, for if anyone looked at himself in it, Mbata would take hold of his shadow and make him fall. The corpse, using the underground passage, came out into the river. Those who threw themselves into the water sometimes also became Faro.

One day Mbata resumed her human shape and went to the market where she bought tomatoes. She asked those she met what they did for the spirit who owned the water they so much needed. She advised them to offer him copper and gold and to slaughter white rams at the well.

The following day, in order to give thanks to Faro, the villagers went to the edge of the well to the sound of drums and sacrificed the animal. The water swelled, seethed up, and formed a streat which still runs into the Niger today.

The composition of Faro's body determines the behavior of men in the rituals performed in his honor. While the usual offerings of blood, tomatoes, raw cereal mash, and baked cakes are consumed by him and returned to the givers in the shape of material possessions (children, millet, rain) or spiritual possessions (preservation of the souls of the living and the dead), the choice content of the offerings or sacrifices, the albino and copper, are reserved only for him and help increase his strength and stimulate his action. /44/ He absorbs them for his own sake; thus it is said that: "copper and albino are the sacrificial privileges of Faro."

Manifestations of Faro

All the atmospheric manifestations in the sky are evidence of Faro's presence and power. Rain, thunder, squalls, hail, and the rainbow all demonstrate his action. The lightning that bursts forth in the koblenkaba is a weapon, a small axe (sempere ni or dyele dɛ̃ ɲini) which he throws from the top of the sky. If lightning strikes, it is a proof of his revenge. In the tree, the lightning hits the gecko (ala ɲugu), an evil animal which, when it lives in homes near the hearth, supposedly stirs up fires of conflagration. When lightning strikes men, it is in punishment for the breaking of a taboo. The stone axes, found at the point where lightning strikes, are collected and kept in the sanctuaries of the rain altars, to be used in case of drought or in the course of seasonal rites. They are also placed in the seeded fields, so that their strength, by communicating itself to the seed, may be beneficial to germination.

On earth, Faro is conceived of as a unique being whose principal home is the Niger; he is present everywhere. In practice, the Bambara believe that a spirit haunts each torrent, pond, or well, each gourd of water, each dewdrop; they call him dyi tigi, "master of water."

776 On market day, a gourd filled with river water, called fle ndinye
823 faro, is placed close to the shore where the canoes land. To drink a
782 mouthful of this water is equivalent to a sacrifice to the spirit. The drinker gives a cowrie as alms to the beggar who drew the water, for "never can [Faro's] water be bought or sold" (1).

1. Ma ti dyi fere ma ti dyi sã̃.
See pl. II, b.

At Sama, the faro tyin is a kind of natural corridor located amidst the rocks bordering and overhanging the left bank of the river.
[825] The finches nesting there warn the boatmen of the place's sanctity by flying off; the boatmen then stop to pray. In passing, they throw an offering and those who have broken taboos purify themselves by washing. Each shows the spirit all that he carries with him. Two nearby trees, faro sõ̃ndyiri or "trees of Faro's sacrifice," are used to tie up the white bulls at twilight. The following day, they are thrown alive into the river with millet mash and cola nuts. At the bottom of the passage, on a fairly smooth surface, the image of Faro described above was drawn each year in the course of the ceremony celebrated by the society of the Komo.

/47/ Faro also haunts ponds and wells. In the village of Nango a natural well was revealed to a hunter by a white ram which appeared out of a thicket. The village was built after the discovery of the water hole where the inhabitants now worship the spirit.

In the village of Siyango, the water of the well in which Faro resides is tabooed, the site of the well being the seat of all the religious ceremonies of the villagers. There the newborn are presented,
[755] and deaths and marriages announced. The sick are treated by being made to drink the well water and wash in it. From his herd, each person offers every year an animal which is thrown alive into the pit.
[681] Finally, those condemned to death are executed by drowning in the same spot.

Faro's Auxiliaries

776 Faro has placed spirits as his representatives in the skies, in space,
•773 on earth, in the trees, and in the rocks of the mountains. They see

776 to it that all things proceed in good order. In addition he is accom-
773 panied by auxiliaries who participate in his work.

The most important of these is his "secretary," the bolokuruni, a blacksmith of the black race who had lost the use of his hands and who went to live with Faro after his crippling.

This blacksmith lived on earth at a time when craftsmen did not know the use of tongs and used to seize the red iron in their bare hands to carry it to the anvil. The man who was to become Faro's companion had reached an advanced age and was still practicing his art when one day both his wrists were broken by the hammer of a clumsy apprentice. Mad with pain, he ran to the river and threw himself in to ease his suffering. Seeing that in his grief the man had turned to him, Faro took pity on him and kept him at his side. His body was never found and a diviner told his family the happy event of his disappearance.

The bolokuruni accompanies Faro and assists him in his incessant labor. He is the one who consults the register in Faro's fins in which everything is inscribed. "The requested image is sent from the fins into the pupil of Faro's eye which the blacksmith watches." As this image is reflected in the servitor's eye, he uses it according to the orders he receives. Thus he verifies daily the count of those living and dead.

776 /48/ The spirit has numerous auxiliaries among the animals. His
825 airborne messenger is the swallow. It never rests upon the impure earth and its wings, reproduced on the headdress of the old men, symbolize the words it carries. The scorpion's stinger is the weapon given by Faro to the original twins: whoever attacks or wounds a twin is stung by this insect. The crocodile is the executor of Faro's important works: it kills those guilty of breaking taboos, or chases undesirables away from the river's edge. The scaleless fish, called kokoni, directed the first streaming of the waters on earth (1). The

1. See p. 33.

tneni (2) is Faro's "ordure" which it is the duty of someone to sweep

2. Alestes nigrilineatus.

776 At death, he takes back the spiritual principles of the diseased and
773 preserves them in water so as to reintegrate them into another body, thus using forces which are eternally reusable. The product of the "shedding" (mana or folo) of souls which remain on the altars is for him in a way of constantly verifying the account of those living and dead who are entrusted to him.

On earth, men are indebted to him for all they possess. He gave them language, an expression of thought, and taught them its usage, having warned them against the misuse and evil use of words.

The techniques of survival, another expression of "Faro's words," so necessary to their lives since they have to provide the means for their existence, were revealed to them by the spirit. He helped them with his sovereign power, either by directly providing them with new tools, or by inspiring some of them to develop new techniques by putting to use observed facts. In this way, he gave the Bozo fishing nets which enabled them to catch the first recorded animal food, the fish; likewise, he encouraged among the Bambara the discovery of weaving through observing the spider's web.

He also gave men certain seeds which became the origin of farming, such as cotton and fonio, both of them being known before millet and the other cereals.

As proprietor of cowrie shells and metals, he is the master of wealth, distributing it as he pleases. Thus, one who owns precious
[183] metal is responsible to Faro for it and owes him a part of one's earnings. For this reason many offerings are made by throwing gold or copper into the river.

776 Faro's deed is essential where the Bambara's main activity, agri-
241 cultural work, is concerned. Every man with dignity and nobility must cultivate the earth in order to honor Faro. Each stroke of the hoe is a wound inflicted upon the earth and a punishment for its impurity. Each stroke of the hoe humiliates Mousso Koroni and purifies the earth. Faro watches over the soul and the vital force of the seeds. Only he can provide rain necessary to germination, for rain contains the soul, (ni) of the cereal grains as does the water of ponds and streams which one collects in case of drought.

776 Millet receives its soul as soon as it gets the humidity of the earth,
774 and from that time on, it accompanies the various stages of germina-
241 tion with utterances which, at the beginning of the world, could be heard. As soon as /54/ it has received the rain, the seed splits and says: "My place is assigned." Then the sprout comes out of the earth

55/etymology are often associated with an historical event (1). The most

1. On the historical aspects of the dyamu, see P. Humblot, Du nom propre et des appellations chez les Malinké; M. Delafosse, Des soi-disant clans totémiques de l'Afrique occidentale /The So-called Totemic Clans of West Africa/, Ch. Monteil, Les Empires du Mali.

familiar names are derived from those of the mythical families (2).

[73]

2. The Bambara myth mentions family names that were determined by Faro when he classified beings and things. It is still generally said of this event: "When Faro travelled, he broke the support for Mousso Koroni, and an agreement as to names was made by him" (faro tama na muso koroni jigi kari la, dyama dyamy ko la dili kera faro fe).

On the other hand it must be noted that a dyamu, which applies to a great number of total families living in various regions, is not always reserved for the Bambara groups only. The dyamu Kouloubali, for example, also belongs to certain Somono and some blacksmiths. This means that a dyamu is not only attributed to a family in its broadest meaning, but also to people apparently unrelated to it. Another typical fact makes it impossible for us to give the term "family" the meaning it has in our societies: a person changes his name when he leaves his country. A Dogon becomes Keyta when he goes to live in Mandé. A Bambara Traoré, if he goes to the land of the Wolof, becomes a Diop (3). Finally, an important family may

3. An investigation of this very important aspect of Sudanese social organization remains to be made.

have several names and devices.

T84 It has not been possible heretofore to consider all aspects of the various taboos. On the other hand, the great number of versions concerning their origin indicates that the current story, told to all who pass by, conceals much deep notions of the categories that indicate the bonds linking men to animals and plants (1). It would also be

1. See also L. Tauxier. La Religion bambara (Théorie des Ntana et des tabous /Theory of the Ntana and Taboos/), pp. 114-138.

appropriate to study the relations between the species, between animals and plants and minerals in terms of the spiritual forces that animate them.

Whatever it may be, the taboo confers on man his title of nobility; not to possess one is degrading. It assures the protection of the group that observes it. Thus, the hyenas of Konodimini protect the village inhabitants who feed them.

Examples of taboo:

T84 JT3 The Traoré family has crocodile flesh as its taboo. An ancestor called Makyon, having transformed himself into a crocodile, fed his family during a famine that lasted six years; he fished and brought the catch to the members of his family.

In the seventh year, since the famine still raged, the Traoré decided to kill him for food. In the morning, when he appeared with the fish he had caught, an old man advanced to attack him. /81/ The animal stopped him and predicted he would die if he pursued his plan. The man paid no attention and wounded the beast which had enough strength left, however, to return to the river. The old man regretted his act and the others tried to disassociate themselves from the responsibility. The following morning the crocodile came out of the river and died at their feet so that they might see what they had done. The guilty man was in turn killed by his family and the two corpses were buried together in the same shroud. When all was over, the chief revealed that Maydon /sic/ was a member of the family, that as a member of the same race he had been feeding his kin

784 during the famine, and that in the future the crocodile would be taboo
•773 to the Traoré as a sign of gratitude for his gift and as an apology for the murder committed.

The taboo of the Diara family is the lion, whose name they bear. In the olden days two old friends were always in the habit of hunting together with arrows and spears. In the course of a long famine, their weapons broke and they were not able to find others. In order to feed their families, they attacked wild animals with bare hands; the one would stun his victims with his fists, and the other would skin them.

Gradually the life they were leading changed their behavior. They no longer washed, their hair and beards grew, and thick hair covered their body. Their nails became so long and so hard that they used them to slice meat and to dig the earth. They even forgot the language they had spoken and only communicated by grunts.

They fought with the spirits to gain a foothold in those places ordinarily reserved for the latter. They no longer returned to their village. Their parents searched for them, but as soon as they saw people, they ran away. They ended by walking on all fours and appeared like the animals they pursued.

One day as they lay sleeping next to each other, they mated and the stronger one impregnated the weaker to give birth, a little later, to two lion cubs. The men who saw them in the bush with their offspring decided that hereafter they could not kill a lion for it had their blood in its veins. Even today, when a Diara meets a lion, the animal lies down, "so ashamed to be descended from the mating of two men who had become beasts."

784 These two examples, selected from many others, illustrate the relations between man and animal. These appear even more clearly in the mechanism set off by the breaking of the adopted taboo.

Indeed, the first consequence of any infraction is the offender's loss of the seeds in his collarbone, a symbol of his basic sustenance. He becomes "an empty granary" and, deprived of his strength, is unable to contend against that of the wounded animal /82/ attacking him. The pain he feels at that moment is proof of the state of his physical and psychic inferiority. Any breaking of a taboo affects first the eyes, then the other openings of the body.

•784 If the animal is wounded, it delegates its tere to warn the guilty
783 man of the sin committed, but makes no attempt on his life since it is his ally. On the other hand, its death liberates its nyama which

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/98/ Chapter 5

TECHNOLOGY

T13 The Bambara who are conscious of the evolution of their civilization trace it far back in time. The history of their origin as well as the feats and exploits of their most distant ancestors are not only inscribed in their memories but also in present day ceremonies and often in the material products of the culture, secular as well as religious.

The invention and evolution of technology, in the course of which the spiritual and the material, revelation and human effort, all work together, give rise to legends and representations which are characteristic of Bambara psychology (1).

1. What we relate here concerning the origin of technology is exclusively a summary of what the natives tell. The context, in the form of practical daily rituals, of which the forge is the best example, is sufficient and requires no commentary.

According to Bambara thought, all technology is an atonement taught man by Faro, a palliative to cosmic disorder, generally induced by a broken taboo. Famine, war, epidemics, misery, and death, which such disorders bring about, are compensated for—as far as possible—by new technologies which are revealed as needs arise. All these exist potentially in the wooden club used to smash and beat the fiber, which was the first raw material used (2).

[T1] 2. The wooden club is a duplicate of the mythical blacksmith's hammer which contained the techniques and the cultivable grains (see p. 53, n. 1). The same origin of technology is given by the Dogon, see Dieu d'Eau, p. 84.

T13 829 The first works were made by "primitive men," ancestors of the Bambara of whom the following description is given:

773 829 "They were covered with shaggy body hair, beard and hair; their long nails resembled claws; their teeth resembled fangs. They knew no language and had no clothing to protect themselves from bad weather; they lived in holes dug in the /99/ ground or in habitable natural caves, at the bottom of which they slept and kept their prey. To defend themselves against wild animals, they placed wooden spikes and pointed rocks at the entrance of these quarters. These deep holes communicated with each other and together formed regular underground villages" (Fig. 6) (1).

[332]

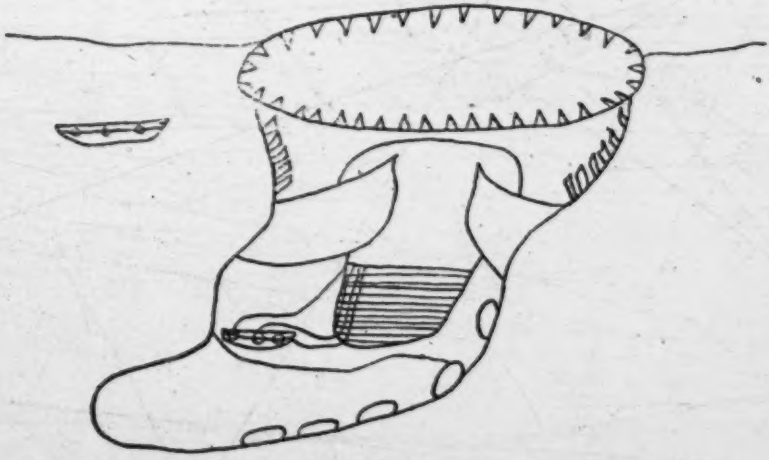

Fig. 6 —Underground home of primitive men. The entrance is guarded by pointed rocks. In the center, the drawing of the first loom invented by men. At the left, the shuttle (see p. 181). (Drawing by an informant.)

[172]

1. Some of these excavations in the neighborhood of Ségou, which may still be visited today, are venerated by the Bambara as ancestral homes.

Since they did not know language these men communicated by means of head gestures, movements of the feet and hands, and grunts. When a difference arose between them, before using their hands they drew back their lips and measured their long canines to determine who the winner would be. "Later they were given language, but

773 knowing its power, men at first used it sparingly. A question was never
829 discussed twice. If a request was reiterated, after an objection, the party requested would bow and agree at the risk and peril of the person making the request."

Men first lived by gathering and later by fishing and hunting without tools, using only /100/ hands to seize their prey, and nails and teeth to tear and cut it. Gradually this primitive life changed; technologies developed one by one according to a chronology which the present Bambara still remember.

773 The first raw material used, according to a tradition which is not confined to the Bambara alone, was the fiber of the nyama tree (1)

[824] 1. Bauhinia reticulata (in the north), Bauhinia Thonningii (in the south).

(nyama fu) out of which were woven the first fishing nets, the first sling, and the first loincloth (2).

[[71]] 2. The Dogon also mention this fiber as the first material used by men. With them as with the Bambara, it has a ritual function. See M. Griaule, Dieu d'eau, p. 26.

When they began to work the soil, they developed a set of primitive wooden tools. At the same time, they invented a throwing weapon made of the same material. Wood remained in use for a long time; the invention of weaving and crude pottery goes back to this period. Later, they came to know stone tools, iron, and the forge. The art of house building, about which no myth has been gathered until now, seems to have developed much later, after the discovery of iron (3).

3. Certain parts of the investigation concerning technology have been summarized by the author in "l'Arme et l'outil chez les anciens Bambara /Weapons and Tools among the Ancient Bambara/," Africa, Vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 105-111.

The study of this assemblage of tools and of their ritual use is most suggestive because they are a first indication of technological

TT3 evolution. They also indicate different stages in the development of the forms. These may be observed in certain museums of arts and crafts which, in some villages, are the sanctuaries where ancestral material is kept. Finally, in numerous ceremonies and in the education of the young, they constitute precious milestones in the history of the Bambara people.

Fishing and Hunting

TT3 226 According to tradition, the fishing net was the first instrument of technology taught men, and fish constituted the primeval food.

"One day, four women went to the shore of the Niger to collect sand which they used for bedding and which also served as food since they no longer received any from the sky. As they advanced, the sand drew back so that they soon found themselves very far from their usual stopping place. They /101/ then wished to return, but Faro prevented them from doing so and asked them to work for him, promising them a precious gift in return. They "swept up the spirit's excrements" for seven days; on the eighth day, "the words began with Faro." He showed them two fishing nets, dyo, and explained to them their manufacture and use. One had very fine loops, dyonyemise (literally, net of the thin eyes), and the other larger loops, dyonyekumba (literally, net with big eyes). Both were made of the fiber of the nyama tree. The first was reserved for tneni (1) fishing, called

[825]

1. Alestes nigrinileatus.

"Faro's excrements," and the second for the capture of larger fish such as sheatfish, gurnard, and catfish.

"For seven days the women were taught by the spirit and his captive; on the eighth day they were liberated. Seven days after these events they began to fish and to nourish themselves with fish.

"But they soon abused the gift they had received. Taking turns day and night, and fishing without interruption at the very place of the revelation, they taxed the spirit's patience. The latter appeared to them above the water, holding his girl twins in his arms; he complained of their harshness, their stupidity, and the weariness they caused him. Reclaiming the secret he had given them, he indicated to them that fishing would hereafter be a man's job and that they would only have the right to sell the fish.

773 226 "Despite their tears, the spirit gave the nets to three men who were present and repeated his teaching. The women left the water's edge while the men turned their new knowledge to account. But at the end of a few days the women became hungry; they went to ask for fish which for seven days was denied them. They then united with the fishermen and the Bozo people were the issue of these first marriages."

At first, fishing was reserved for the Bozo people alone and it was only later that the Bambara learned from the Bozo how to make and manage the fishing nets as well as how to carry out the numerous rites centered around them.

773 226 411 The Bambara practiced hunting and gathering before becoming farmers. It is interesting to compare the fishing net with the sling (ndõfere) now mostly used by children. One of its models (Fig. 7) is

[532]

Fig. 7 — Sling (ndõfere) of the ancient Bambara (Drawing by an informant).

described as having been the most ancient of their weapons of the hunt and war. The central portion of this sling which in reality had the shape of a net /102/ (dyoba, literally, big net) woven from nyama fibers and similar to the one used by fishermen, was drawn out into two thongs. The right one (kinintegere, literally, tegere of the right) ended in a sort of a bouquet of wooden lamellae (tegere), making it easier to hold. The left one (missema, literally, little thing) or numan (literally, left) was free. The man would hold the weapon by both ends, putting stones in the net and "blowing on the right thong to give breath" to the sling. Placing his left foot forward, would twirl it rapidly and let go the left thong, thus releasing the projectiles.

773 224 411 Propitiatory sacrifices were offered on the wooden lamellae and the blood ran along the thong into the net. In addition, the hunter would saturate his weapon with the blood of wounded or killed animals to give his contrivance the victims' strength and to increase his own skill.

The ndõfere was used for a long time as a military weapon.

Weaving

773 286 The invention of weaving is linked to the discovery of cotton cultivation. The latter appeared long before that of millet at a time when the only known tools were those of wood used to scratch /103/ the earth at the base of the wild grasses with which men nourished themselves (1).

[171]

1. See p. 154. The Dogon admit the same priority of weaving over cultivation of cereal grains. See M. Griaule. Dieu d'eau, pp. 31ff.

The myth mentions simultaneously the appearance of cotton and the invention of spindles and shuttle; it does not mention the loom which appeared later. The tale of the manufacture of the first clothing also includes details on dyeing which seems to have been known at a very early date.

When the men returned from the bush where they had been cultivating the norolã̃ sise (commonly known as cram-cram) and the narakata, a kind of couch grass which provided them with edible seeds, they would often abandon their wooden hoes at the crossroads in honor of the Soba spirit.

One day an old man who used to pass nearby was summoned by the spirit, saying: "To all of you who leave your hoes as you pass by, I wish to give something to hide your nakedness; but I will do it if you offer me a sacrifice."

The old man reported this incident to the men of his generation, who decided to sacrifice an albino at the crossroads. The spirit then told them to take the seed which they would find at the intersection of the roads and taught them how to sow and harvest it.

773
286 "This," he said, "will be useful to you later as clothing." Men first made skirts of leaves and fibers which they used as loincloth. Then they sent their women to sing and give thanks to the spirit. When they had sown and harvested, they placed the cotton on the crossroads as a gesture of homage (1). The spirit then taught the wife of a farmer,

1. This custom is still observed today.

who used to come and greet him everyday at noon. One day she saw at the crossroads a bird whose name means "little bird who spins the cotton of God" (ala ka kwori parata kono ni). It held white fibers in its beak, pulled them out with its feet, and rolled the thread thus obtained around the body with its wings. "Watch the bird," said the spirit. "In this way he spins and weaves in the sky in order to protect his eggs. Cotton should be used in this way. Your death is near. Begin work from tomorrow on this little stick," he added, pointing to a spindle, "and teach the women of your family and the children."

The woman first spun awkwardly and went down to the river to show Faro her work and to ask for help. A fish came out of the water and gave her a spindle whorl in the shape of a ball, showed her how to adapt it to the spindle, and explained to her its use and divine origin. It announced to her that hereafter similar spindle whorl would fall from the sky with the rain for the women who spun cotton.

/104/ Having resumed her work with this new tool the woman was successful in it and taught her companions. They then threw their first threads into the Niger as an offering to the spirit so that the secret might not be lost. All artisans did the same with their first piece of work (2).

[782]

2. Every first piece of work is thrown into the river as an offering to Faro. It is a guarantee for the artisan that his skill will be retained and that his technique will improve. Actually the young spinners of Ségou throw their first spindle into the river. In addition, the parata bird which taught weaving is captured, its wings and feet are roasted, and the powder is given to whoever begins the appreticeship so that it may be over rapidly.

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286 Seventeen days after the apprenticeship the old woman died. Her companions continued to spin but since they did not work on wood (1), they had to ask the men to carve spindles, thus revealing

[412] 1. Except for cooking, a woman never uses a knife, an object reserved for men.

their secret.

Some time after this the spirit sent a spider to weave its web at the opening of one of the underground holes used for habitation (see Fig. 6), where lived a man called Bambou Diara. The latter watched the insect and they called in his friend, Kari Mariko. They wished to imitate the web by using the spider's thread which, however, proved too fragile to work with. They then asked the women for their cotton threads. Holding a twig of straw on which he had wound the thread, and having secured the warp, as had the insect, to the two rocks protecting the entrance, Bambou imitated the spider and made a kind of round fan, shaped like the web with coarse loops. When he had woven two, he joined them with a rope made of nyama bark, thus obtaining the first loincloth (mbogo nimba).

Kari Mariko had watched the work and had noticed the difficulty with which his friend threaded the woof through the warp. He got the idea of winding the thread on a thin stick more resistant than the straw and of placing this in a stone trough which would slide easily between the elements of the warp. This was the first shuttle (kuruni). He wound the thread on it in three bobbins, the symbol of masculinity, thus consecrating weaving as man's work. The threads were then stretched horizontally and the shuttle was used vertically, thus cutting across the warp each time it went up or down (Fig. 6).

All came to see the work of the two artisans and named the village where they lived the "village of intelligence, hakilidugu." They learned from them the art of weaving and today the names of the two friends are still invoked over the plate of food which each apprentice must eat before beginning his instruction.

Following the breaking of a taboo in the course of a fishing expedition on the river, the spindle whorls ceased to fall from the sky. Since then, fishermen /105/ produce them by mixing clay with karite oil and drying them in the sun.

773 286 [785] The loom was invented later. The positions of the warp and woof and the practice of breaks and knots were modified. The loom was formerly the object of nocturnal human sacrifices whereas the shuttle received lesser sacrifices in the day time (1).

1. At present, looms are set in the ground above a piece of pottery, the bottom of which is pierced before the pot is buried.

The stone on which women clean the cotton, kaba, represents the sky and recalls the divine origin of cotton and of the technology relating to it.

Clothing

291 Clothing which has intimate contact with the human body is a part of the person wearing it. On the other hand, the material of which it is made, and the various elements which compose it and which are associated with one or another aspect of Bambara metaphysics, exercise an influence on the wearer. The choice of clothing is rarely a matter of chance or individual taste and the various manifestations of social or religious life usually obligate people to wear appropriate clothing, the symbolism of which is linked to the action or circumstance under consideration. The role of the garment appears as early as infancy: a newborn wears around his loins a cotton thread, dyura dyuru, which is both a protection (for it "solidifies his spinal column") and a foreshadowing of what he will wear later. When he reaches the required age, a family reunion takes place on the day he is dressed for the first time. Before this, it is necessary for him to have dreamed of his first garment and to have talked to his mother of this dream; she then begins to spin the necessary cotton. Before dressing, the initiate proceeds with an ablution called mayadyi (literally, water of the person's action) in water taken from the Niger or from a pond of Faro's. The dressed child is told "that he is now a man and may become a member of the ndomo (2)"; then his kinsfolk tease

2. Society of the uncircumcised (see p. 222).

291 him and joke with him, indicating by semi-ritual jokes his accession to a new status.

291 773 Men's first garment was the skirt of nyama fibers (Fig. 8, A). The bark was beaten and prepared by means of a club, a wooden club, gosilande or kuruninde, which is /106/ supposed "to contain potentially all human technology invented as the need arose." It is said of this club that it is "the mold of perfection and the place from which all useful things issue." The club was also originally a primitive instrument of rhythm (1); the hammering of blows "chased away the evil

[783] 1. kow dyele bwo yoro. On certain occasion when the Komo masks are brought out, the chief carries on his head the gosilande which represents the universe. Certain collective purifications are also executed with this instrument at the crossroads (see p. 186).

[755] sounds emitted by Téliko at the time of his revolt." Even today, a deafmute is seated near the gosilande which is prayed to so that he may be rid of his infirmity. The clothing of a woman in labor, in [844] order to purify it, is beaten with the gosilande at the same time the infant utters its first cry. Dyed clothing is beaten not only to make the color penetrate, but also to chase out any impurity.

When they first learned about cotton, and after the invention of weaving, the Bambara made garments which are in disuse today but of which they still make specimens for ritual purposes. In fact, with the exception of the loincloth, these ancient garments are worn only during religious ceremonies and their principal function is to represent the ancestors who were their progenitors.

291 773 386 The first garment woven was an imitation of the fiber skirt. The men made loincloth (mboko nimba) still worn today by the uncircumcised and dyed it yellow, wolo (2) (Fig. 8, B), a color which

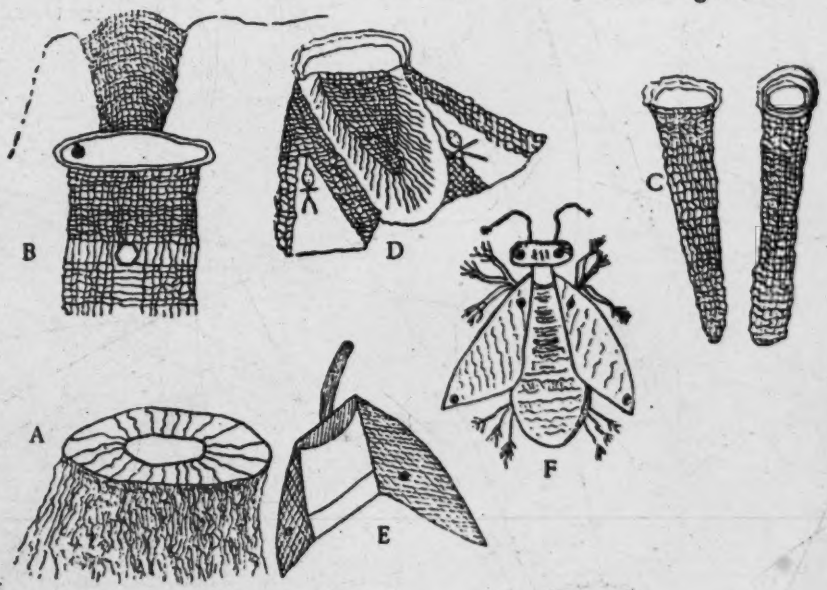
[824] 2. This dye is made with the leaves of the ngalama (Angeissus leiocarpus), which are boiled, dried, and pulverized. The powder is put in water.

represents that which a certain disease gives to the black's skin,

291 which they got rid of by means of this dye. A live swallow was im-
773 mersed in the liquid, which was obtained by soaking the leaves and to
386 which was mixed ground charcoal, and later was released, thus conse-
crating the dye into which the loincloth was soaked.

291 The next garment was made of two strips, dyo kama (literally,
773 shoulder nets), which were hooked on to each arm. The strip on the right arm, representing male, was attached by three thin straps (male number). The other was attached by four straps, four and left being female. The wearer would lie down over the strip on the right side

[532]



[787]

Fig. 8—Ancient Clothing of the Bambara.
(A) The skirt of nyama fibers; (B) the loincloth; (C) the "shoulder nets"; (D) the tunic; (E) the bonnet are made of dyed and woven cotton threads. (F) the dung beetle, an insect which plays a part in geomancy. (Drawing by an informant).

and would cover himself with that on the left (Fig. 8, C).

Next, men made a kind of short tunic, wolo kama (literally, partridge wings), which was dyed red (Fig. 8, D). At the top of the openings where the arms passed were suspended /107/ two little figures (mani) carved out of wood. These represented the souls of the wearer, "took their life from the veins, and gave their strength to the

291 773 arms on which they rested." The center of the garment represented the chest, the liver, and the heart of the wearer; the horizontal threads the veins and arteries. The supporting collar, made of three bark fibers of the da tree, was "the individual's double during his sleep." Sweat was the offering made to this garment. In the cold season it was replaced by salt. The first time a man wore this garment he would pray: "Garment, we wear you in the name of our old ancestors and in honor of those who created you."

The ancestors drawn on the sanctuaries and the granaries are all equipped with caps, banfla, which they wore in olden times (Fig. 8, E). At the top were affixed a wooden picket and a hyena tail, through which the sky gave its strength to man who in return /108/ would send his "through the wind." The cap (čema), made of strips of yellow dyed cotton, had wings (bamadae), symbol of the ears: the lines on the right wing assured numerous offspring and those on the left, a secure and righteous life. The wings also recall those of the swallow, the water spirit's messenger entrusted with carrying into the womb, at the moment of sexual union, the drop of blood containing the child's life and soul. The two indigo dyed spots on each wing are the symbol of this womb.

The cap as a whole (farofla) was the "link maintaining the life of man," who is himself represented by the line which encircles the cap. It protected him against cold, disaster, and death. It was also the symbol of Faro's home and power. When he received it, the wearer would say: "Wing of the cap, cap, son of Faro, I have drawn you with strength. Oh, swallow" (1).

> 1. Bamade, bonza, farode, ni be ke ola ni barikaye, nanale. The primitive clothes described above were observed by an informant at Bougoula and are presented to the postulants at the moment of their initiation.

After the invention of the loom, clothes were no longer made piece by piece. Bands of cotton made by weavers were used, cut up, fitted, and sewn—a technique still observed today throughout the Sudan.

291 773 531 There exists a "science of the bands," finew tno or finew dongo, which is familiar to all those who wear the traditional clothes. It

291 rests upon the knowledge of the symbolism of colors, drawings, and
773 numbers. The bands are numerous and each one represents one aspect
531 of metaphysics, one fragment of the myth. Thus, the story of Mousso Koroni is told in four successive bands (Pl. III, from 5 to 8). The wearing of the bands depends upon the physical or moral state of the wearer, upon his functions and activities (1).

> 1. We give below the description of a certain number of these bands, chosen from the ones most representative; we intend to publish a complete study of this aspect of a technique most revealing of Sudanese psychology.

291 The white band, finin muku dye, represents Faro, being as white
773 and luminous as the sky and the rays of the sun. White denotes wis-
531 dom and purity of the spirit, the purity of blood. The one who ap-
522 pears in public thus dressed is respected because he affirms thereby his desire to follow religious rules. It is also the color of offerings made to the spirit. A piece of white cloth is sometimes hung over the door of a home where people have just /109/ made a sacrifice. A sick man throws three white bands into the river, or gives them to a person poorer than himself. A white cloth, worn over a man's shoulder, "strengthens his nerves and articulations." At nightfall every evening, all the children put on a tunic of this color. Thus, despite the darkness, they are "in Faro's light" and will recognize each other in times to come as the children of one father, one family, one blood. The marriage veil is made up of eleven bands each measuring eleven cubits; these are not sewn together but rather basted in spirals. Thus dressed, the woman goes in the night to her future husband's village, in the luminous word of Faro and surrounded by the twenty-two elements of creation, the eleven spirals intersecting each other on the right and left. A dead person is also dressed in white: trousers with six strips representing man and his dya, and a hat with three bands. He is rolled up in a blanket of the same color and visitors place upon the corpse pieces of white cloth or cowrie shells. The whole signifies good will, sincerity, and devotion toward Faro of the deceased who must be "white under the earth" if he has not broken any taboos.

The opposite of white is indigo, konofi, which symbolizes darkness and impurity and which is worn in most cases where the spirit's

291 activity is not involved. Nevertheless, a woman puts on an indigo
773 loincloth the day she resumes sexual relations with her husband after
822 the end of her menses; she retains it until pregnancy. When she is sure
531 of her condition, she puts the loincloth in the sun to purify it and will place the newborn child in it to remind him later that he owes his life to his parents. A dead person who has broken a taboo is buried
[764 in an indigo shroud, the only reminder of light being a white cotton
784] thread which is placed on the corpse as an expression of apology and forgiveness. Since indigo is taboo in most of Faro's sacred places, no one wears it during sacrifices or religious ceremonies.

White and indigo complement each other. To twist a white and
[789] an indigo thread together to make a string used for holding an amulet is to "roll together happiness and unhappiness, as in life."

The dye wolo is the color of yellow copper. It is in this color that the newly circumcised are dressed after the operation and until they are healed. Red, mbegu, is the color of copper and of blood. Hunters who wear a tunic of mbegu are "covered with a garment of blood." The band kayo (Pl. III, a, 1), in which are found these two colors, indigo and white, reproduces the rainbow: the white intervals are symbols of the word and of purity. /110/ A person making a sacrifice sews a piece of this band on his clothing to indicate that he is circumcised, that he is a hunter, and that he is truthful in his actions and words. A band is hung at the gate of the northern entry to the village in order to protect its inhabitants from dangers coming from outside. A man wears it when he has been ill or has suffered serious financial or family difficulties. On the altars, on the doorways, the colors are represented by millet mash, blood, and kola nut extract.
[821 As the rainbow keeps away the rain and dries up water, the kayo
784] strip may not be worn near the river or during sexual intercourse, for it is Faro's taboo.

The band sirakele (literally, a road) (Pl. III, a, 2) represents Faro's descent from the seventh part of the sky down to the seventh part of the earth, the indigo stripe being the dyi fi, "black water," the spirit's earth seat. When put on the loincloth of a married woman, it expresses her rectitude and the good behavior she intends to maintain towards her husband. When worn by a traveler, it prevents him from losing his way.

291 The buguni (1) (Pl. III, a, 3) is "the sun ray Faro gave to Pemba
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1. The word designates the band's place of origin, Bougouni.

291 for his great earthly labors." When clouds form, it is said that Faro
773 "is showing the buguni in the sky" and the diviners advise each person
821 to wear a strip in homage to the spirit and to facilitate the coming of
531 rain. The geomaneer gently rubs the earth, where he is going to draw signs, with a cloth of this design. It is as though he has injected sun, light, and truth into the work he must execute on the impure soil.

291 This band is also called kolõso mako, "necessity of the mixture, "
773 or kami, guinea hen, whose plumage as well as whose fragility the band betokens. In this respect, the buguni symbolizes man's weakness and incompleteness. When placed on a convalescent's clothing, [755] it signifies that the latter has lost some of his vitality during his illness. Dressed in this fashion, he goes to the Niger and bathes so that Faro might heal him. A man who has suffered severe financial losses also wears the buguni. At the market, in public meetings, he will not be made to pay his share of beer because of the band's silent language which is clearer than words. If a widower remarries, he sews a piece of it on his cap in memory of his first wife. The knife of the person offering a sacrifice is wrapped in the buguni, for it "never has enough blood, " also in certain boli which continually crave it.

/111/ In conclusion, the squares of indigo cloth represent the void and darkness; the white ones, fulfillment and light. To wear the buguni signifies hope, the impure or weak man hoping to become pure, strong, and fulfilled.

The bugunimba (literally, large buguni) or nyedẽ (literally, threads of the eye) has the same symbolism. A wound is bandaged with it. A man who has broken a taboo wears a cap of this material; an illegitimate child also wears it. The buguni tyekorole which symbolizes the impurity of Mousso Koroni is used to implore Faro's help in great calamities and for misfortunes without remedy. Thus, the body of a stillborn child is covered with it.

291 The buguni nyama (Pl. III, a, 4), made of twenty-two alternating
773 indigo and white squares, symbolizes creation in its harmonious and
822 orderly entirety. Its separation into two layers recalls the duality of
801 nature, represented by a thin stripe through the middle. A happy man sews an entire strip into his tunic. The man who has difficulties of any kind divides it lengthwise and pins a small piece at the bottom of his garment.

291 773 822 801 The nyeba, "big eye," or koloso tyema, "mixed masculinity" (with femininity), (Pl. III, a, 11) also represents creation, here symbolized by the double layer of five indigo and white bands (1). At

1. On the value of number 5, see pp. 24, 25.

the same time the cloth also symbolizes the complete man, said to be both masculine and feminine. A newborn child, but never an illegitimate one, is clothed in it.

291 773 The band soli (Pl. III, a, 5) represents the good conduct of Mousso Koroni at the beginning of her life as well as her betrayal which brought disorder on earth.

531 [764] In olden times, people who had committed bad deeds were obliged to wear it. Today it is used as the shroud for a child who dies immediately after birth; a strip is sewn to the garment of a recently excised girl or to the loincloth of a woman insured in childbirth. When differences or conflicts arise within a family, a fragment is placed in amulets which the women must then wear.

[828] The wutu nyekorotike (Pl. III, a, 6) pictures the disorderly voyage of Mousso Koroni, her despair and her madness. This pattern is reserved for insane people in order to warn others of their condition.

The band gombo (Pl. III, a, 7) recalls the pursuit of Mousso /112/ Koroni by the god Pemba into the depths of the sky and the earth.

The band tyatyeli (Pl. III, a, 8) a picture of Mousso Koroni's defeat, symbolizes human work. It is given to a courageous and energetic woman. It is circulated among those present at religious ceremonies and its mere presence indicates that nothing here below is obtained without work and that all stems from work. To wear this band strengthens the man who is entering upon a task in a village other than his own.

The band saki is the koblenkaba, "red sky." It symbolizes heat, anger, difficulties, and sorrows. It is woven at the time of marriage negotiations for the purpose of resolving any differences of opinion.

[844] A piece of it is dipped into the blood after birth and then thrown away in order to purify everything.

[822] The blue stripes of dyitala represent impurity, and the red stripes, purification by sacrifice. Whoever has broken a taboo wears the blue, and the red when he is purified. A piece of red cloth may be inserted into the vagina of a young woman, after she has lost her virginity or

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to replace the blood lost in childbirth; this piece is then burned to hasten the healing of the wounds.

The loincloth of a woman who has given birth to twins is made of the sukaba band with large, regular, alternating squares of yellow and indigo. The mother places on the garment as an offering a little of the millet mash she feeds her children for the first time.

The band nyoronga was formerly used for shrouds. The king would wear a whole garment of this or had three bands sewn onto his tunic when he went off to war; thus he wore his own shroud. A brave man would tie a piece of it to the barrel of his rifle to show his indifference in the face of death. A strip was tied to the right hand of those killed on the battlefield as a reward for having done their duty. Today, a shred of this band is hung at the door of a home where a death has occurred; People bandage a wounded limb with it before going to the healer's.

The wutu tyerokole with three stripes is worn by a child born after the death in infancy of numerous brothers and sisters. It represents the departure of these members of the family and their return in the newborn. Shaking such a band in the air honors the seventh sky and the seventh earth and asks their protection for the child. This cloth is never worn at funerals.

/113/ The kemba (literally, mother of scarifications) (Pl. III, a, 10) substitutes for scarifications when it has not been possible to perform them; on the other hand, this band is taboo to those who are ritually scarred.

The warabawolo (Pl. III, a, 12) represents the lion of the Diara: the first son of this family was born on this cloth. A boy born with a lock of hair on his forehead is seated on the cotton band to make him strong and rich. Formerly the king made a rug for his throne out of it. Since the lion is their taboo, the Diara do not have the right to wear it or even to see it.

Weapons and Tools

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Originally, men lived by hunting and fishing. But hunger drove them to eat plants of which the first three are the yayalé, an aquatic plant commonly found on the shores of the Niger; the narakata, couch grass; and the noroli size, commonly called cramcram(1). Long

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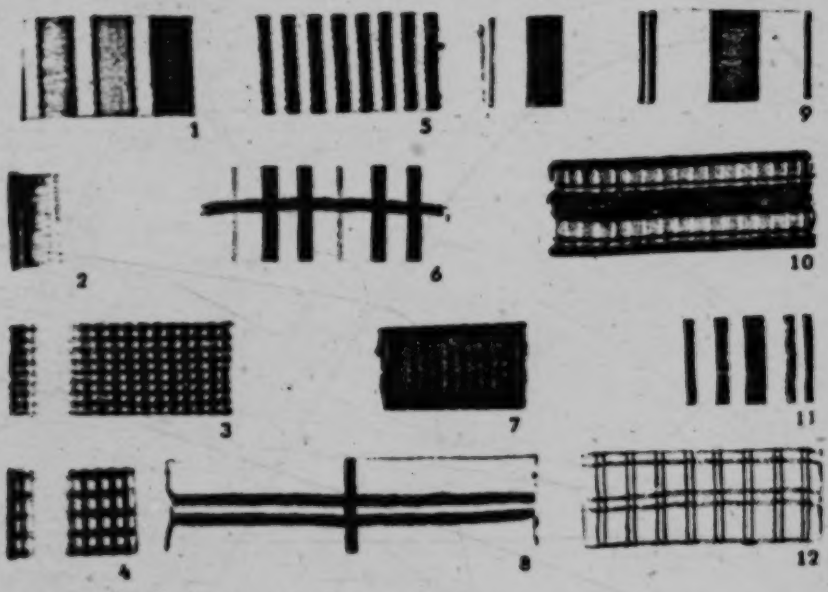

(a) Bands of cotton (the warp is presented vertically).

Plate III

(b) Offering of a band of cotton to the dasiri tree (Soroba).

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1. These three plants are respectively: Andropogon (Hyparrhenia) hirtus, Digitaria debilis, Cenchrus catharticus.

before the cultivation of cotton and cereals was known to them, the Bambara worked the soil with wooden sticks around the base of those grasses whose seeds they then sowed. As their stock of tools developed, they began to make the first hoes and axes. In the case of the Mandé Bambara (2) the origin of these tools is linked with the history of the

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2. The names and the origin of tools of the Bambara of the Ségou region are different.

blacksmiths, numu, who form a kind of caste in this part of Africa as in many others. They practice endogamy, maintain joking relationships, senankuya, with other Blacks, and are in charge of certain cults dedicated to ancestors and to Faro (3).

3. On the myth of the divine origin of blacksmiths, see S. de Ganay, "Notes sur la théodicée bambara." See also infra, p. 53 n. 1

Before the discovery of metal, ancestors of the present blacksmiths worked with wood, then stone. From then on they bore the name of numu, a term which today is reserved exclusively for the artisans of iron, jirifa numu or farafa numu, according to whether they worked with wood or stone (4).

4. L. Desplagnes mentions the historical aspect of the origin and role of the Sudanese blacksmiths (Le Plateau central nigérien /The Central Nigerian Plateau/, p. 110).

The peoples issued from the intermixture of the ou, shepherds (Getules), with the ar, sedentary tribes (Fari), have already been pointed out in earliest antiquity by writers, historians, and geographers who called them Numidians. Salluste tells us that "The Faronsii, in mixing with the

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getules (gne-Toules), formed the nation of Numidians.

But according to tradition, these half-breed Numidians, today called Noumous, were the first initiators among primitive peoples of the industrial arts; thereafter the title of Noumous was kept and applied to all blacksmiths."

And in the footnote on the same page: "But in Nigerian countries, this term for blacksmith, Noumou, does not necessarily contain the notion of a metallurgist."

/114/ All blacksmiths said to be of "pure blood," that is to say those who belong to the three families of Fané, Koumaré, and Balo, are descended from the Gwonna, who came from the underground village of Gwondougou and to whom goes the glory of having discovered iron.

According to informants, the word Gwonna comes from gwã̃, a name usually given to the hearth of the forge, which designates precisely the place from which the ore is extracted and where it is treated. The high furnace is called gwã̃ so. The gwã̃ tuku munu, extracting blacksmith, is the only one able to perform important rites. The word Fané derives from fã̃, which designates the forge in its entirety. Koumaré comes from kuma, word. It is the Koumaré who are charged [537] with the responsibility of debating in council meetings or in public gatherings. The word Balo recalls the fact that the bearers came to settle in former days on the shores of the Niger, ba.

The Gwonna are senãnku of the other blacksmiths. Moreover, in the villages where they live together with other artisans, they are by right the chiefs of the Komo and guardians of the sanctuaries where the ancestral tools are kept. Only if they fail in their obligation will the blacksmiths belonging to other families assume these duties.

The titles of the Gwonna are linked to the mythical origin of the forge which is under the domination of the Téliko spirits, masters of the air and wind, hence of the bellows and fire.

773 564 326 They inherited them from the eight ancestors who, before the appearance of death, were transformed into bee eaters (tatugu kononi) by the balanza and who received the power to activate or to extinguish fire (1).

1. See p. 43.

The Téliko spirits, jealous of the independence of these new beings, resolved to subdue them and waged war on them. The birds, who had no weapons, bewailed and a Gwonna blacksmith took pity on them; he requested axes, hoes, and arrows from the men of his family and gave them to the birds, receiving in return the promise of revelations which would be useful to him. Having made this arrangement, the birds, armed with weapons, went to meet Téliko at the place called gonya. They used their weapons in a gigantic conflict in which neither adversary could vanquish the other.

/115/ The birds then returned to earth and thanked the blacksmiths by teaching them three secrets necessary to the good progress of their work:

1. How to build their altars by mixing in a panther skin cold water, iron, and a stone, soul of the forge.
2. How to protect from the fire the hands of women potters.
3. How to make and consecrate the circumcision knife.

Since these revelations, the Gwonna venerate these teachers, thus raising the number of their ancestors to sixteen: the first eight transformed into birds who had not the use of speech, and the eight others who received the word from Faro.

564 326 In each village the patriarch of the Gwonna holds the title of kotigi (literally, owner of things). He guarantees the custody of the ancestral tools deposited in a sanctuary and of the ritual objects which belong to the blacksmiths of the village, and which are kept in his home. In addition, he is the only one who may perform the rituals concerning these tools and the purifications.

The important position of the Gwonna family is translated into ritual. Whereas an ordinary blacksmith, after breaking a taboo, must request the intervention of the kotigi to purify himself, a Gwonna simply asks the members of his own family.

564 Every blacksmith is regarded as the holder of an excellent tere.
326 He is well-intentioned, affable, and never hurts anyone. It is easy
774 to make friends with him, to joke with him, even if one knows him but a short time. The senankuya relationships which he has with other Blacks also contribute to the cordiality of these ties.

[304] The good tere of the blacksmith is brought into play particularly at circumcision which is preferably entrusted to a Gwonna. Being circumcised by a blacksmith causes the wanzo to diminish rapidly, hastens the healing, and improves the tere. A blacksmith is reputed to have the power of transforming himself at will into an animal or a plant. In those places where hyenas are venerated as the animal [825] protectors of a village (dasiri), they are always considered as the blacksmith's ancestors who have undergone metamorphosis. (1).

1. Particularly in the village of Konodimi, situated 21 km. to the southwest of Ségou.

773 The ritual paraphernalia now preserved in each village comprise
564 models of all the tools manufactured by the blacksmiths since their
326 first appearance.
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a. Wooden tools The craftsmen first used wood, gradually changing the shape of the objects. From a simple stick /116/ (generally in sunzun) (2) or from a rough-hewn block, they gradually made more

2. Diospyros mespiliformis. The wood of this tree is very hard.

perfect tools, obtaining the shape desired by rubbing and polishing on rocks.

773 The first weapon used in hunting was a throwing instrument in the
564 shape of a boar-spear, the semenkala (from kala, handle, Fig. 9, A).
326 Hewn from one piece, it comprised three distinct parts: (1) the
411 bulonda; (2) the semenu; and (3) the koli (literally, hook). Men threw the object with all their strength at the pursued animal or else they dug into the earth where their prey was hiding with the pointed end (semena) which was often poisoned with a viper's venom. The weapon was the object of blood sacrifices carried out on the koli and destined to increase its strength.

●773 564 326 412 [172] The first agricultural tool was the yirewolo (literally, noble, Fig. 9, B), thus named because of its antiquity, mogokoroba (literally, old person, ancestor).

b. Stone tools Later, craftsmen learned to use stone. They used neolithic axes called "thunder stones" (1) which were used as scissors.

1. The Bambara, like other Blacks of the Sudan, attributed divine origin to certain neolithic axes (see p. 71. It would seem that a great many primitive tools had been found by them in the area at the time of their arrival.

Those of the Gwondougou were at all times famous for their solidity. The craftsmen worked together and when they had rough-hewn their models, certain individuals among them were delegated to sharpen these by rubbing them on a rock.

The farakun (literally, stone head) (Fig. 9, D) was the first axe the handle of which was invented by an artisan who, having poisoned the sharp edge of his tool, wished to try it out on a tree. He sank the stone into a young tree trunk with the idea that the leaves would dry up of themselves. But he died without having ascertained the result. Later a passerby, having tried in vain to remove the stone from the tree, cut the wood above and below it, and in handling this new tool, was surprised at its efficiency. The use of the hafted axe spread among men who utilized the fiber of the nyama to tie the stone to the wood. In addition, the stone could be separated quickly from the handle and used as a knife to cut meat or bones. The handle was used as a pointed stick with which to dig in the ground and to attack animals.

It is probable that hafting was also applied to wooden hoes made in two sections and used /117/ for a long time in areas where there was no hard stone. In fact, a myth concerning the discovery of the cultivation of cotton, which preceded that of cereal grains, mentions the fact that men used to take their handles home, but left the ends of their hoes at the crossroads each day in honor of the local spirit.

c. Iron tools Finally, the Gwonna discovered iron and developed the science of metallurgy (2).

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2. The Blacks consider that the discovery of iron and metallurgy are due to the Gwonna. It is, however, not impossible that this technology was imported by craftsmen who came from the Mediterranean.

At a time when the men had left the village of Gwondougou, taking their altars with them, two girls left their home and went to live with two artisans of the Fané and Koumaré families.

[532]

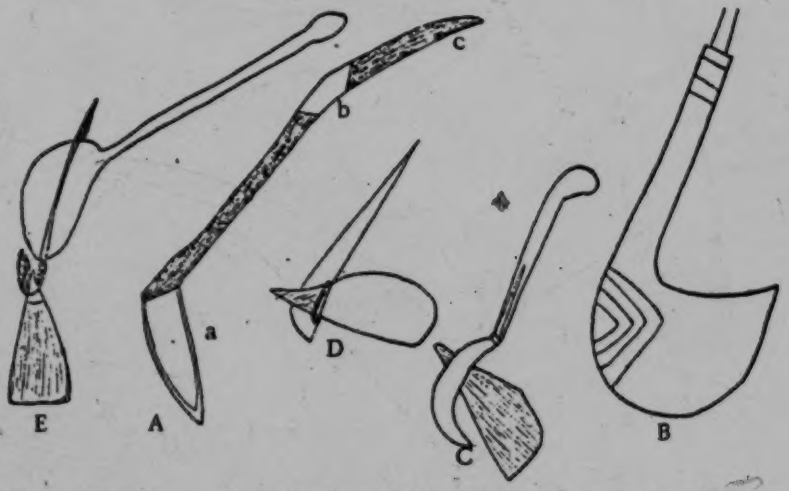

Fig. 9 —Weapons and tools of wood (A and B), of stone (C and D), of iron (E) of the ancient Bambara. (Drawing by an informant).

When the men returned to the village to get some hard stone which they would like to use, they were very much troubled not to find their girls. They dug the ground to search for them, thinking that they had been buried, since men in those days lived in laid-out underground holes. In the course of this work they discovered some rocks which were hitherto unknown to them and which are called farabele. The men thought these rocks beautiful and wished to use them. When placed in fire they were changed and became so hard /118/ that the hammers with which the men attempted to shape them split. The pieces of iron were then used as projectiles to replace the stones of the slings. But the blacksmiths, who had abducted the young girls and who had returned to the village with their wives, saw the new substance and suggested the idea of making axes out of it.

773 564 326 412 The first forged tool, the kongobwona (literally, to abandon hunger), is still used by blacksmiths today as a ritual axe (Fig. 9, E).

It is made up of a wooden handle terminating in an enlargement which forms its bulk, and pierced by a bent iron rod which in turn holds the cutting edge (farabye) of the axe proper. The handle is very long, allowing the man to work without bending over.

The tool justifies its name for it brought prosperity to the craftsmen. The symbolism of the different sections shows this: the enlarged part of the consecrated model, which each blacksmith keeps on his altar and which is the object of regular rituals, is hollowed out and holds money, millet, and copper. The iron rod which pierces it represents at its lower extremity the tongue of the oldest of the Gwonna, and at its upper extremity that of the youngest, thus recalling the actions and the words of those who discovered the metal for the benefit of all.

Later, blacksmiths manufactured other models of iron axes and hoes, copying those previously used, but reducing their size.

Each day the end piece of the wooden hoes was abandoned at the crossroads after they had been used in honor of the local spirit. The worker kept only the handle and carved a new tool for the following day. The handles of hoes and axes were considered to be people because they were impregnated with the vital force of those who held them. The farmer left the cutting edge (of stone or iron) in his field and brought home the handle which he placed on his mat at night.

[782] Weapons and tools were the objects of regular sacrifices. The handle was removed and the blood of victims would flow first into the hole used to secure it, then on the cutting edge, while the officiating person recited a prayer.

773 564 326 412 778 Today, the assemblages of ancient tools are called makorobaw ka minew (literally, tools of the great ancestor). Considered as the most respectable and precious /119/ testimony of their civilization, models of each object are kept in sanctuaries called makoroba so (literally, house of the ancestors) which are generally natural caves or holes dug in the ground, reminiscent of primitive habitations. These tools are identified with the ancestors who used them and who were, long before the organization of religious societies, the object of a regular cult. That is why, in deference to this fundamental hierarchy, they are presented to the circumcised in front of the family altars (1) at the time of the initiation of the Komo. Similarly, they

1. Particularly in the village of Konodimini in the Ségou region.

773 564 326 412 778 are removed from the sanctuaries, honored, and replaced before the Komo altars during the agricultural and funerary rituals; to fail to observe this rule would constitute the breaking of a taboo and entail the most serious disorders.

In the course of the annual ceremony consecrating the dead, these tools are carried to the cemetery and receive as many victims as do the dead, for they represent the ancestors.

The kotigi brings them to the same place on two other occasions: during the agricultural ceremonies carried on after the growth of the ear of corn and after threshing the harvest. Axes and hoes are presented one by one at the tombs of the dead and then, reunited in the center of the cemetery, each of them is used once to cut a branch or to dig the soil. This ritual gesture recalls the use which the ancestors made of them.

The Forge

326 826 The blacksmith establishes his workshop under a shed, usually located in one of the squares or at the entrance to the village. It is the simplest of its kind and involves a minimum of equipment. The forge represents the craftsman: the furnace his body, the bellows his testicles, the blast pipe his penis, the fire his head. When the red-hot metal is beaten with the hammer, a replica of the gosilãnde, which symbolizes the universe, the sparks are the lightning and thunder bolts.

326 778 The altar of the forge, sometimes situated to the west of the hearth, contains blackened hoe, pickaxe and axe handles, coal (fininkoro, literally, old coal) ashes kneaded with clay (bũguri, literally, ashes of the hearth), all of which belonged to former owners, and finally an axe kongobwona called "mother of the altar," a smaller replica of the ancestral axes.

The bulk of the wood which holds the iron hooks and the blade /120/ is hollowed out and forms a kind of storage divided into three compartments.

The upper one contains money so that whatever happens, the blacksmith will have means to live.

In the central compartment are placed copper and iron, metals which the blacksmith works, as well as water, basic element and preferred seat of Faro, master of the word.

Pottery

323 The ancient Bambara did not know about pottery. At the time they
773 lived in caverns, they let their meat dry in the sun on the rocks. Next, they manufactured receptacles by hollowing out stones, of which certain unused millstones /125/ seen today are copies. When they had invented fire, they cooked meat by spitting it with skewers of green sunzun wood and by exposing it to flames and live coals.

Later, they shaped and dried vessels of coarse clay, imitating the hollowed-out stones. One of these vessels, which was exposed to the fire in order to cook the food it contained, was observed to have changed color, hardened, and become more resistant. In this way they developed the technology of making pottery at a time when they still had only wooden tools.

323 Since this technology is related to the invention of fire, the wives
326 of the blacksmiths were the first to practice it.(1). Today they form
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1. The different techniques of pottery making were supposedly revealed to the village of Gwondougou (see p. 155) by the Soba spirits of the crossroads.

a society (tõ) in each village and own many altars entrusted to the care of the head of the society.

The principal altar, the dyo kala, which represents the thumb of the potters, is made of wood carved in the shape of a thumb and engraved with symbolic lines. To learn her trade, each initiate is lightly touched on the head with it. The head of the society spills her blood over it in the case of a broken taboo affecting the society. But its principal function is to be the receptacle for the spiritual forces of the group: upon a member's death, this object, placed upon the corpse, gathers up the soul which escapes from the body.

[252] In certain villages, the pots with holes, ñintin, used for cooking couscous, are placed near the village upon the pile of ashes from the great hearth where the pots are fired (see Pl. IV, a); they also serve as altars at the time when the potters are consecrated.

323 Since her childhood the potter, following the example of her
561 seniors, practices kneading and shaping little pots, bokofani (literal-
575 ly, little clay pots). After excision at the required age, she joins

B. The Altars

778 794 Each family head wears a small altar called kere la boli ni (literally, little side altar), which maintains relations with the souls of the members of the family for which he is, in part, responsible. /132/ In case of illness he offers sacrifices on this boli for the recovery of the patient. In case of death, he keeps the soul in it temporarily before carrying it to the collective altar of the Komo (1). He also sacrifices on this

1. The society, the altars, and the role of the Komo are described on pages ff.

altar at the time of sowing.

[763] If the family head is himself very ill, the altar is placed on his head in an effort to replace the soul which is escaping with that which the altar contains. If he dies, it is placed on his chest to take in the [764] soul which is then transported to the sanctuary of the Komo. At the end of seven days, the object is given to the deceased's eldest son who, upon becoming family head, sacrifices two goats to the Komo on this occasion.

The ɓuafebla (literally, worn at the hip) is made by a father for his son when the latter attains maturity and is on the point of leading a man's life, farming his own field and founding a family.

If there is no Komo in the village, the father may make it earlier, right after the name-giving ceremony.

The altar is made of hyena tails, scorpion tails, and whole peppers tied with a little stick; it represents the owner's flesh and blood.

It receives an annual sacrifice at the time of sowing after the collective offering tothe Komo. This takes place in the family courtyard in the presence of all the members of the family (2). Moreover,

778 794 ●773 241 2. The cult rendered on this altar brings the intervention of the Sago spirit whose agricultural role is still obscure at the present stage of the inquiry. He taught men how to water their fields.

"Two birds konodyanfi began to circle and sing above the workers in the fields;

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the latter abandoned their hoes in order to watch them. The birds fetched water with their beaks on the shore of a neighboring pond and returned to pour it at the foot of a millet stalk, the ear of which was not yet formed. The men put a mark on this stalk in order to recognize it and later observed that it produced a finer ear than the others. Imitating the bird, they dampened their plantings and watered their fields; their harvest was considerably improved by it. They kept up this habit and, in acknowledgment, produced a cult to the Sago spirit whose emissaries the birds were and who comes to slake his thirst at the Čuafebla."

778 it is the object of sacrifices when important business is being handled:
794 marriage, private or administrative action, fight against an epidemic.
[428] A son may inherit his father's altar and keep it with his own which he wears tied to his hip.

The Čuafebyɛ̌ni (literally, little horn at the hip) is composed of a cowrie, taken from Faro's granary, copper which is the altar's soul /133/ (ni), pepper, charcoal, and honey. This mixture is introduced into a ram's horn decorated with cowries at its opening and often wrapped in a red cloth bearing the same ornamentation.

[782] The altar is consecrated on those of the Komo, over which it is passed seven times. The throats of victims are cut, their blood is collected in a gourd, and the boli dipped into it three times before being taken out in the sun to dry.

Its role is one of protection. Its owner carries it during the Komo ceremonies to defend himself against spells, korti, which may be cast by someone in the audience.

It also maintains the integrity of its owner's forces. If the latter faints or goes into a trance, he is returned to his normal state by completely renewing the ingredients which constitute it. When the horn is emptied of its contents, "both the soul of the altar and that of the man" are removed. The container is rinsed out with water from the

794 on half-gourds, and accompanied by flutes and bells. The musicians,
534 recruited from among the musical members of the society, are obliged to submit to certain precautions because of the proximity of the mask during the performance of the dances. In fact, if the mask casts a spell (korti), they may, unwittingly, breathe in the dangerous powder and it is wise to protect oneself by taking the antidote ahead of time.

794 The Komo's iron bell, kolokolo or grinda, is kept with certain
534 altars in the chief's residence; it is rung by a special bearer, grindayo or nadara koloyo.

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539 A myth recalls the origin of this bell. "A small child, who went to play at the crossroads situated at the approaches to the village, heard one day a bell ring and invisible beings speak. Seized with fear, he returned home. When he was questioned by his parents, he refused to answer but with his finger pointed out to them the road which he took every day. The parents followed it and arrived at the crossroads where they found a copper bell. The spirit of the place, Soba, announced to them that he was making a gift of it so that they might call the spirits by ringing it and that the spirits would answer them (1). But he asked the father to give him in exchange the child

1. In olden times, "men spoke with their ancestors and with their gods."

who habitually came to the crossroads so that the child could continue to play with the spirit's children. When the father, in despair, told him he had not the courage to part with his son, the spirit advised him to consult Faro.

The man gathered the young girls of the village together and asked them to intercede for him with the spirit. Dressed in their most beautiful clothes and wearing their ornaments, they went off singing and threw cakes and couscous into the river (2). The elders

[796] 2. Each year the offering and the race are repeated by the young girls of Ségou who go to the river singing the nyari nyari to.

went down in turn and received Faro's consent. He demanded that

794 they keep the instrument for religious ceremonies. After declaring
534 that they would obey, the elders returned to the crossroads where
773 the Soba spirit gave them the bell and left in exchange the child whom
539 the spirit had called to him in their absence.

The object was then taken to the blacksmith who made one in the same shape, using wood or bone for the body, and stone for the clapper. After the invention of iron, they were forged according to the ancient model with the addition of small copper bells."

794 /153/ To ring the bell is "to make Faro hear the sound of copper,"
534 to call him, and flatter him at the same time. When the mask is brought out, the sound warns the noninitiates to avoid the procession. The flute or reed pipe of the Komo, wara da, "mouth of the one armed with claws," is made of a bamboo stem pierced by three holes. The middle one is open and the two others are obstructed by a cobweb. The instrument is held between the bearer's teeth and is tied by a string to the back of his neck or to his ears.

794 A myth tells the origin of Faro's flute, made according to the
534 same principle, but of a different shape.
773 A woman, called Koussouba Koulibali, was bathing one morning
539 when she saw Faro and the dodo fish sitting at the river bank. The fish was playing the flute and singing:

"I will whistle, I will whistle in my Faro's flute; he who will not hear me will die, he who will die will regret it" (1).

1. Na fye, na fye ne nka faro fle flye,
nyimi mame o na sa, nyimi sara o bone na.

The woman fled and told her husband, who was a diviner and chief of the Komo, about what had happened. The latter proceeded to the banks of the Niger and frightened away the fish who abandoned its instrument. The man seized it and went home, followed by the turbulent river water from which he managed to escape in his canoe. But his whole family perished in the flood.

In the morning, the man returned to the river bank and cried as he played the flute. He played for such a long time that Faro, taking pity on him, came out and said: "I have drowned the members of your family and flooded the village. I forgive you, however,

794 because of the offerings made by other men. Keep the flute and
534 since you are Soma and chief of the Komo, let all the Komo flutes
● 773 be blessed because of this one." By this he meant that the Komo
539 flute, like the other ritual objects, would hereafter contain his strength, nyama. He added that, when men wished to call him or to talk to him, they would have to do it through the intermediary of this instrument.

794 Before each occasion when the mask is brought out, a sacrifice is
534 performed upon the flutes "to improve their sound." Faro's flute is used in the rituals performed at the river bank, to pray to him or to thank him. To play the flute is equivalent to reciting his device; he is forced to hear. The Komo flute is used only during the masked ceremonies; it makes those who hear it say that the Komo is "a thing with a soft throat" (1).

1. Fɛ̃ kã̀ duma.

In former times the chief alone was allowed to play the flute, whatever its type; death was sanctioned for infraction of this rule. Ordinary flutes /154/ of a style different from those belonging to the cult are used by children.

E. Initiation to the Komo

794 Three days after the birth of a boy, his father presents him with
852 the elements which he has contributed to the making of the Komo boli and recites the komo kumã̀: "You, Komo boli, these things are inside; society of the Komo, these things are inside; customs of the Komo, these things are inside; you are a child, you are going to approach the age of the elders; Komo boli, here is my child, watch over him" (2).

2. Komo boli la, nin waliw ba kono; komo dyɛ̃ la, nin fɛ̃w ba la; komo sira la, nin kunko ba kono; i ye demisɛ̃ ye i bi ta makorobaya ye; komo boli nde fle, tyɛ do, i dyã̀ to a la.

He then returns the child to its mother with these words: "The son has been introduced to the secret of masculinity; he has received

794 The candidates next swear an oath the text of which is recited by the chief:

"If I reveal (the secrets of) the boli, may it kill me; if I disclose the institutions, may they kill me; until my death, if I speak, may my father die, may my mother die, may the boli break my heart" (1).

1. Ni nye korobo, boli ka fa, ni nye korobo, dyow ka fa, fo kata n sa ni nya fo n fa ka sa m ba ka sa, boli dyugu ka sõ ta.

Each in his turn, the children next lick the head and the hooks of the mask three times, thus assuring it their allegiance: "Until my death, I shall not reveal the koli. Faro has not been revealed! Let the koli not be revealed!" (1)

1. Fo ka ta n sa nte korobo koli, faro ma korobo, koli kana korobo.

[782] After the altars, including the pembele, have been presented to them, the postulants drink the blood of a goat offered in sacrifice; thus they assimilate the forces of the Komo and by this communion consecrate their oath.

Finally, the mechanism of the society in all its details is explained to them: the necessity of hierarchy in age grades, of respect for taboos, and of the secrecy in which all that concerns the organization must be held. A moral lesson is also taught them; in particular they [867] are advised to set themselves a line of conduct in private life as well as in public life, to be righteous, to avoid duplicity and bad faith, flãvlãña (literally, double action), never to serve two masters, and not to entertain conflicting desires among themselves.

794 As an illustration, the adventures of the first members who broke these laws are told.
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One of Makanta Djigui's companions, Garou Keita, was afflicted with this serious fault. He had become friendly with Moridje Sidibé, son of the famous Soma Moriba Sidibé, who had the same character. At this period three great Komo were already functioning in the region: that of Koulikouro called selo (literally, grave); that of Nyamina called dyibi (literally, dark); and that of Kankan.

Garou went to one of the ceremonies of the Komo of Kankan /156/ and by telling lies, incited the members to revolt against the local

chiefs, which they did. They interrupted the dances and refused to recognize the Komo which was dissolved, leaving the chief alone. But Garou, who had lied, died shortly after that.

The chief of Kankan carried away the altars and put them under the protection of the Komo chief of Koulikoro, and the members participated in the ceremonies of this locality. Moridje went to Nyamina and, in the same way as Garou, incited the members to engage in a kind of rivalry with the Komo of Koulikoro. In the course of a ceremony celebrated in this latter village, he called forth the Komo of Nyamina, using the authority attached to his father's name, and offerred a male goat to both groups. The two chiefs refused, arguing with reason that one victim could not satisfy two Komo. Moridje paid no attention and brought the two maskers face to face with the goat between them. A fight took place with the animal as a pawn, each masker using his magical powers to win it, and the members gathered behind their respective masks shouting: "the goat is ours." Later, the mask wearer also died prematurely.

To avoid the possibility that members will give their allegiance to two Komo, they are made to lick the mask once again, while the following prayer is recited: "If you lick the mask, may you not make the flãvlãña, may you not perpetrate a betrayal" (1). If, after swear-

1. Nye komo kun no, i kana seka flãvlãña kẹ, nye komo kun no, i kana seka dyãfa kẹ.

ing this oath, the party betrays it, he becomes "a rotten person" (matolilo) and loses the esteem and confidence of his companions.

As the young men grow with years and increase in knowledge, the instruction they are given is increasingly comprehensive. The head of the Komo, accompanied by men of his age grade, takes the postulant into the bush and questions him about his intentions and aims. Before indicating to him the group to which he is to be attached and introducing its members to him, he teaches him by drawing on the ground the combination of signs representing the arrangement in the universe of the Komo society, a combination which is usually reproduced before each ceremony and which permits the participants to recognize their place (see Fig. 12).

This drawing, called wolo ti, "sign of the generation," is composed of two long lines cutting each other at right angles and oriented

776 latter animal which is imitated by the vukuri during the children's
825 nocturnal ritual described on page 65.

This new information confirms the observations noted on page 47, footnote 1, concerning the identity of the Bambara and Dogon representations. Moreover, the warableni, like the yurugu (Vulpes pallida) of the Dogon, intervenes in divination, particularly in geomancy. The investigations permit the extension of these representations to Sudanese tribes coming from Mandé (see p. 2), particularly, to the Bozo and the Peul.

Chapter 3

826 All Sudanese peoples originating in Mandé are characterized by the
773 seeds (or fish) contained in their collarbone, these varying from one
824 tribe to another. On the other hand, within a tribe, the theoretical content of the eight seeds, though roughly similar in terminology, differs in arrangement from family to family. Also the positions of the first and last seeds are reversed for men and women. Example: the blacksmiths have as their first seed the keninge and as their last the tikaninkuru, whereas the potters have as their first seed the tikaninkuru which they cultivate in the sacred fields (see p. 170) and as their last the keninge.

Moreover, after Mousso Koroni had stolen from Pemba the seeds he was entrusted to give on earth, Faro, through the intermediary of the /232/ animals who ate them at his order, reclaimed them from her; thus purified, he distributed them to men. The animal, which brought back to Faro the essential seed of each family, becomes the taboo, tne, of the family concerned, and the breaking of this taboo has the basic effect of removing the content of the culprit's collarbone. Analogous representations are noted among the Dogon.

Totemism, the so called "joking relationship" (senankuya of the Bambara), the caste system, and the exogamous laws of the Sudanese are based on the elements and classification of the contents of the collarbone.

Chapter 6

794 All the great adult institutions (dyo) are in contact with the
857 children's society of the Ndomo which reflects the universal organization
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144 which encompasses all social, technical and economic activities" (1)
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1. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion], P.U.F., 1951.

of this people. The myths are "a sum of knowledge, wisdom, and not a series of fixed etiological recitations. One may say that they constitute a metaphysic including the knowledge of created things, as well as the principles of their state of being and of their action." (2)

2. Id., ibid.

171 Thorough investigation of other Sudanese peoples has revealed that the
771 Bambara religion is part of a pan-Sudanese system in which differences lie in the modes of expression and not in the essence of the thought.

A. Cosmogony

772 The Bambara conceive the world as a mass of active forces which man can influence. Thanks to certain techniques, the pivotal one being the blood sacrifice, man may amass or liberate these forces, may direct and orient them; in short, man may have a hand in the movement of the world and may aid it in its consciousness and accomplishment. This central role of man is explained to us by the order of creation itself, which governs all the rites to which man is subject. The Bambara conceive the world as having issued from an
773 original void which was endowed with movement (3): the gla. This

3. Passim, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

void emitted a voice which created its double, and from the couple came a humid substance, zo sumale (cold rust), which formed hard shining bodies. After a series of movements and transformations, there was an explosion between the two gla, which caused the ejection of a hard and powerful matter that vibrated as it fell. Out of this vibration came signs which settled on all the things as yet uncreated to designate them. Then, man's consciousness detached itself from the gla and settled on things to awaken their consciousness in naming them. In the

773 course of this creation, the active spirit Yo appeared, plus 22 fundamental elements, 22 whorls which agitated Yo and gave birth to sound, light, all beings, all actions, and all feelings in existence. Afterwards, a series of disorders followed by reorganizations came to trouble creation; man played a preponderant role in these.

Two initial powers were born of the spirit Yo: one, Faro, master of the Word, made the seven skies, which correspond to the seven parts of the earth in following a calculated course; Faro gave birth to Teliko, spirit of the air, then, in the form of water, spread life on the earth and created two twin females who gave birth to the Bozo, first inhabitants of the waters; the other power, Pemba, in moving with a whirling motion to the four cardinal points, created the mounds and buttes which give form to the earth. After seven years in his whirlwind form, Penba transformed himself into seed of the Acacia albida, came to rest on the [82] earth and developed into a tree, the balanze, which became his earthly avatar. Then, with the dust of his tracks mixed with his saliva, he created a woman, Musso Koroni, into whom he breathed a soul, ni, and a double, dya; he joined with her and created the plants and animals.

Men rendered homage to Pemba and Mousso [sic] Koroni, who, in exchange, gave them directions for life. All the women had to join with Pemba; which is why Mousso Koroni, jealous, began to trouble creation and to sow disorder. She instituted circumcision and excision, and revealed to men all she had learned from Pemba. Communicating impurity to all she touched, she introduced evil, pain, and death into the world. Pemba pursued her; Faro overtook her but was unable to subdue her. Finally, she died, but before disappearing she revealed the agricultural techniques to man.

Pemba, in addition to the women's love, demanded the men's blood from which he drew his power. In exchange, he rejuvenated the men when they became old and taught them how to use fire. But he abused his power and exhausted the men, which caused his downfall. In fact, the men turned from worship of the balanza and devoted themselves to the cult of Faro. Faro impregnated the women, who gave birth to twins with supple limbs. But the men violated a taboo concerning Pemba, and death appeared and spread among them. To compensate for this misfortune, Faro taught them how to speak. Then, the spirit of the air, Teliko, attempted to seize power; the men

773 abandoned Faro to follow him. Faro vanquished him and punished men by giving them the joints used in manual labor, which all were forced to do. Births became single, but, in compensation, each being had a double, dya, which lived in water.

After these successive disorders, each of which, however, was followed by the acquisition of new knowledge or of a new technique, Faro again undertook Creation and reorganized the universe by a voyage to the ends of the earth. He established the system of the rains, and he classified living beings according to series, each series having a head of the list. Men thus were named and classed by race and by caste, beginning with the slaves. He gave men the eight cereal seeds which remain the basis of their subsistence and which are forever in [826] their clavicles. Finally, he controls all existence and acts of beings placed under his domination.

The present order is only a phase in space and time. Twelve waters are still hidden; they must in the future, on the order of Faro, rise and spread in the world. They will make known the words of the future, and the world conceived by Yo will be realized.

776 All this mythology is presently represented by numerous objects 778 which serve as props for the different rituals regulating men's lives.

Pemba in represented in the houses of the religious chiefs and heads of families by a wooden block named Pembele, image of the first thick plank (1). In a [83] central hollow, symbolizing the tomb,

1. See S. de Ganay, "Aspects de mythologie et de symbolique bambara" [Aspects of Bambara Mythology and Symbolism]. [Ed., J. psych. norm. et path., Vol. 42 (1949), pp. 181-201.]

are engraved three times 22 marks representing Pemba the creator, the transmission of his Word, and his power to Faro, the token of his foreknowledge of all things, etc. Pembele is an altar guaranteeing the prosperity and life of the group.

776 If the balanza tree no longer is the object of a cult, the Bambara still regard it with a special attitude, which recalls its former role. Mousso Koroni is the impure and untilled land; the agricultural techniques she taught are a partial reparation for the disorders she created. This farm work wounds and purifies the land at the same

769 775 participate in men's lives, protect them, and make their fields fertile. The farming tools are presented at their altars before the tillage, and every year their souls come to animate the maskers who dance in their honor under the supervision of the Komo. After the grain is threshed, they receive the first products and are offered sacrifices.

h. Other Rites

788 Besides the rites concerning the person, the Bambara have others, such as those relating to the household wastes where the forces of men are accumulated. The purpose of these rites is to offer these forces to Faro and to regenerate and purify men. The wastes are burned periodically, the men breathe in the fumes, and the ashes are thrown in the river. Sacrifices are offered to the god, and special dances accompany the ceremony.

796 Rain rites common to all of Africa are practiced in May by the members of the Kworé society. The rites for renewing the year involve individual, familial, and collective participation. The signs of the world are traced on the walls of individual or collective sanctuaries, and by the intermediary of a sacrifice on the altars, by dances and rhythmic chants, man renews the cardinal points and the forces of the world which in turn renew his soul. (All these rites have been described by G. Dieterlen in the Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

B. Special Technique In General Usage

● 773 In Bambara thought, "every technique is a reparation taught man by Faro, a palliative to the cosmic disorder which is generally caused by an infraction of taboo ... Men first lived by gathering their food, then later by fishing and hunting; they used only their hands. Little by little the techniques appeared, following a chronology remembered by the Bambara of today. The first material to be used was the fiber of the nyama tree frond which were made the first fishing nets, the first sling, the first covering for the sexual parts." (1) The second material was wood from which the farming

1. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

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773 tools and the throwing weapon were made. Then, unfired pottery and weaving were invented; and men finally came to know stone tools, iron and the forge. The technique of making dwellings seems to have developed more slowly.

a. Fishing

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564 Side by side with populations who specialize in the art of fishing, such as the Bozo or the Somono caste, all the Bambara fish in the [96] rivers or watercourses in the neighborhood of their dwellings. A detailed study has been made by J. Daget (1). The Somono, who

1. Jacques Daget, "La pêche dans le delta central du Niger" [Fishing in the Central Delta of the Niger], Journal de la Société des Africanistes, Vol. XIX (1949), No. 1.

are the caste of Bambara fishermen, use traps and nets for fishing; the Bozo remain faithful rather to harpoons and small nets. They are
Ba the ones who almost always make the pirogues, for they alone may
Bo enter in rapport with the spirit of the water, Faro. The nets are of
286 knotted mesh made with a weaver's shuttle, sia, and a cylindrical
227 mold, pako. The band of the net, as it is being made, is nearly always attached to a wooden bridge especially conceived for this purpose, the kale or dio soyo kala, a regular tetrahedron whose edges
Ba are about 20 centimeters long, one of which is prolonged by a handle
Bo 1.50 meters long. The fisherman, seated on the ground, puts the
283 bridge before him, keeping the handle close to his leg. The fibers
824 used in netmaking are da (Hibiscus cannabinus), kie (Figna unguiculata), cotton, and now European thread.

Bo The Bozo construct weirs from cut and joined tree branches;
226 the weirs assume several different forms according to the regions and
Bo the snares used. Fish are used for human consumption; they are eaten
Ba fresh, grilled, fried or boiled, or preserved by smoking or drying. Oil,
251 used for cooking and as a lubricant, is extracted from certain fish,
252 such as the tineni.

Ba Fishing in Bambara villages is done communally under the
226 direction of a fishing chief at the time the waters recede. Precise rules of fishing rights and of rents due the masters of the waters are respected everywhere.

b. Pottery

323 Pottery is entirely fashioned and fired by the women of the blacksmiths' caste, masters of the fire. The modelling is done in two ways, either by hollowing a mass of clay with the aid of a cylindrical stone (2), or by rolling a cylinder of clay around a mold. The

2. M. Griaule, Masques dogons [Dogon Masks].

[531]

decoration is generally a double line of chevrons imprinted around the neck and the foot by the potter's twisted bracelet. The firing is done in the open air over a wood fire.

c. The Forge

326 Wood, iron, metals in general, are fashioned by the blacksmiths. The blacksmith's workshop and the objects he makes are simple, but they are rich in symbolic representations. "The forge represents the artisan: the furnace is his body, the bellows his testicles, the blast pipe his penis, the fire his head. When the red-hot iron is beaten by the hammer, which symbolizes the universe, the sparks are the lightning and the thunderbolt." (3) With his

3. G. Dieterlen, Essai sur la religion bambara [Essay on Bambara Religion].

rudimentary tools spread on the ground under a shelter, the artisan forges all farming instruments, the principal one being the hoe. The 412 hoe, [97] according to its shape, is considered to be male or female. 831 The female hoe has a short handle with an ovoid swelling at the end, [801] into which sticks the point of an iron triangle. The three sides of this triangle are three arcs of a circle; three, symbol of masculinity, represents here the clitoris, the male principle which sustains the [773] double, the dya, of the woman. (According to myth, it was with the 241 aid of this part of the body that the first being of female sex inaugurated agricultural labors.) The male hoe has a slightly trapezoidal iron part which is attached to the handle in the same manner. The four sides symbolize the femininity of man sustained by the prepuce. Thus,

412 831 the peasant digs with the male hoe and covers with the female hoe; the work done with the female double of the peasant and the male double of the wife symbolizes the sexual union. (1)

1. M. Griaule and G. Dieterlen, "L'agriculture des Bozo," [Bozo Agriculture] Journal des Africanistes [Ed., Journal de la Société des Africanistes, 1949.]

d. Basketry

285 Basketry is done by everyone, men and women; it plays a large part in the construction and furnishing of the house. Sometimes the lofts are immense baskets, woven on the diagonal. In certain regions a great mat is wrapped around the exterior wall of the round hut. The doors of mud huts are often coarse mats woven diagonally [531] which are placed before the opening. But much finer mats, made from fibers of different colors and with geometric designs with a symbolic meaning, cover the ground for sitting or sleeping.

e. Weaving, Clothes, Ornaments

291 [824] The first article of clothing was the fiber skirt made from the nyama (Bauhinia reticulata, or Bauhinia thonningii) and the covering for the sexual parts which are still worn during religious ceremonies.

● [773] 286 Mythology designates cotton as the first fiber to be woven. Weaving is one of the most widespread techniques. Cotton, spun by the women, is woven by the men, in olden times by the captives, who work in the open air near the huts, in the shade of trees in the courtyards or in the public places. A primitive loom made of four vertical wooden parts connected by horizontal shafts and driven by pedals weaves long bands. The warp and woof form a ground stich and symbolize a being of intelligence and eloquence. Moreover, a science of the bands exists which is based on the symbolism of colors, designs, and numbers.

822 The Bambara distinguish three fundamental colors: white, red, and black. Each of these three tints has its history and its role

304 The Bambara decorate their faces and bodies with numerous
● 773 scarifications, with the aim of conferring on the wearer the qualities symbolized by the scars. By their influence on the character and temperament of an individual, they help him to come up to the ideal man. These marks are associated with the myth of the origin of agriculture. They are eight small scars: two vertical ones at the root of the nose, three under each eye. They imitate the facial marks of the mythical being, half man, half animal, who taught men how to cultivate the soil. (1)

1. S. de Ganay, "On a form of cicatrisation among the Bambara," Man.

f. Arrangement of the Settlements

361 The Bambara village follows rules of development which allow a stranger to recognize the disposition of the huts immediately and to single out a chief's house, that of a blacksmith, or that of any other member of the society. In fact, the village is built to the north or east of the protective tree. To the south of the village, [778] is the sacred wood, dwelling place of the chief of the spirits, where the religious ceremonies and the initiation rites take place. As more families come to live in the village, they build their huts around that of the chief, except to the east, for the chief must see the sun rise. The oldest son of the chief, his eventual successor, will have his own plot near his father's. The house of the Komo is situated outside of the village, to the south or west, hidden in a wood or a thicket. At the edge of the village is a round cabin, the house of the Nyama, in the middle is a square cabin with painted walls, house of the Gna (see the chapter on religion). In the center of the village, a cleared place around a doubalé serves for public meetings; the elders hold their councils under the branches of the doubalé.

764 [100] Finally, the cemetery of the free men is found outside the
554 village, to the west; that of captives and people of caste is to the south of the free men's cemetery.

326 Every village has its blacksmith, for he is life, and the vil-
600 lage could not subsist without him. Before the French conquest,

171 614 823 784 in his Die Ethnologie der Indianerstämme von Guatemala /The Ethnology of the Indian Tribes of Guatemala/, Leyden, 1882. This work is cited by Lang in Chap. III of Mythes, cultes et religions. His tné is a friend, a protector, and may be defined as follows: it is an animate or inanimate being entitled to the respect and veneration of an entire lineage, family, or clan, in recognition of an outstanding service which has prevented the lineage, family, or clan from disappearing or becoming extinct, or has preserved them from a misfortune.

773 614 539 784 825 Every tné has its legend. Although in the mouth of the black man the tale may be embellished and decorated a little so that it varies somewhat, the substance remains the same. I will translate a few of these legends, preserving both their form and their substance.

Legend of the Two Kouloubali

The people were at war; everywhere there were only fugitives. The Kouloubali lineage had been cruelly stricken and reduced to two members, two brothers lost in the bush with their wives and children. The elder who followed /sic/ his brother at a distance, (since for fear of being surprised, they avoided camping in the same place). He arrived at the bank of a swollen river and saw he could not cross, there being no boats. "Where can I flee now?" he lamented. "I am in the hands of my enemies! For me and my family it is death or slavery." A mpolio was passing by; it heard, was touched by compassion, and, raising its big, bearded head out of the water, called to him: "I can take you over, have no fear!" The elder of the Kouloubali and his family, with their weapons and baggage, settled themselves on the slimy back of the strange fish and crossed the river. Then he said to the fish: "Listen, good mpolio, my brother and his family are over there on the bank. Do not render them the /19/ service that you rendered me, for he is an ingrate, one without a heart, and he might kill you." -- "Kill me? Come now!" and the fish dove, disappeared, and emerged far over near the other bank, at the moment when the young Kouloubali was wondering how his older brother had been able to cross such a wide

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and deep river when there were no boats. "It is thanks to me," said the mpolio, "place yourself on my spine as he did." And so the younger brother and his wives crossed the river.

The young Kouloubali was heartless. When the women had put down their gourds and baskets on the bank, at the moment when the mpolio leaped up and raised the full height of its body out of the water in order to dive and disappear, he threw his spear at it. The fish struggled for an instant, the water foamed, reddened, and then there was quiet: it was dead.

The family of the young Kouloubali cut up the animal and, without shame or remorse, invited the family of the elder brother to come to the feast. "Eat the mpolio," cried the latter, "never! And may there be a curse on any of mine that dares to eat it." Since that day, the mpolio has been the tné of the descendants of the elder Kouloubali.

To some extent it is also the tné of the descendants of the younger brother, but they eat it except for the head.

Legend of a Branch of the Taraoulé

A woman saw all her children die, and so she trembled for her last born, a sickly, puny little boy whom her milk did not help. One day she was alone in her hut crouched on her mat with the child on her knees, spinning cotton when she began to cry and moan: "You will not live, you will join your elder brothers, you will go away and leave me alone." A spitting snake was passing by; he came in and gently coiled himself around the body of the child. The mother let out a cry, and the neighbors came running.... The snake slowly uncoiled and left the dwelling while the child held his arms out to it and smiled. He did not die but became strong and healthy, for the snake had drunk all the gnâma, all elements of illness that were in him. From that day on the Taraoulé branch of which this child is the father does not eat the spitting snake, or n'gorono, for the curse of the ancestor would descend on them: that is, the spitting snake is their tné. /20/

Legend of Another Taraoulé Branch

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A woman was fetching wood in the forest when she was seized with the pains of childbirth. "All alone, what will become of me?" she cried. "I have no one to help me; who will wash my child? Oh! I will take a corpse home with me." She knelt by her load of wood, gave birth to her child, collapsed, and lost consciousness. A big black monkey was munching fruit in a near-by tree; it saw her and was moved.... It played midwife, washed the little creature, rocked him in its arms, and when the mother came to herself it gave her back her little boy. From that day on no descendant of this Taraoulé branch eats ngoba; this big black monkey is their tné, and the ancestor would curse anyone who did so.

Legend of the Two Djara

Two Djara brothers with wives and children were fleeing before their enemies. Overcome with fatigue they sat down in the shade of a dondol determined to go no farther. Actually, they were so plagued by thirst that they could not go on. An iguana was wandering in the vicinity; it had pity on the two Djara, so it climbed the dondol and, working with its tail and feet, succeeded in producing a gentle dew under the tree. All were able to quench their thirst with the sap held in the calyxes of this tree's blossoms. "The kana (iguana) shall from now on be my tné," said the elder, "and I curse any one of my descendants who kills or eats it." -- "Think it over," said the younger, "is it not to the dondol that we owe our lives? Is it not its sap that quenched our thirst? Would it not be better to take this tree as tné?" The two Djara argued, could never agree, and separated. The kana became the tné of the older branch, and the boumou, or dondol, that of the younger branch.

Legend of the Samaké

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825 My grandfather has often told it to me; he himself got it from his ancestors.... A Samaké -- I cannot tell whether he had been fording the river or driving the stakes to which fishing mats are fastened -- was seized by an alligator which dragged him to the depths of its den. The alligator did not kill him, /21/ for it had fed.... Leaving the unhappy man to his sad thoughts, it withdrew.... It did not go away, however, and from time to time it hit the water with its tail at the entrance of the hole, making it quite clear that there was only one way out and that this was the door. Stretched out in the ooze, the unhappy Samaké moaned: "Who will save me from those terrible claws and those powerful teeth?" An ant lion at the top of the den was watching for flies and ants in the bottom of its pit; it had pity on the man and, working with its two horns, succeeded in bringing in a ray of sunlight to revive the hopes of the Samaké. "Will I be saved?" he asked the ant lion. Two pinches of sand were the answer, and he understood. Working with both hands, he helped the ant lion; the hole grew and he was able to get through. He escaped. When the alligator re-entered its den, exhausted with hunger, it was disappointed not to find its prey there. So as not to invite the curse of their ancestor, the descendants of this Samaké respect and venerate the géré, or ant lion, and it is their tné. Other Samaké have the elephant (sama) for their tné.

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772 These few legends are sufficient; they all show us that although the Bambara believes that the bond with the tné is simply one of fraternity, friendship, and gratitude and not a bond of real and physical kinship, he nonetheless does not fail to attribute reason and emotion to everything around him, to animals and to plants. In nature he does not find pure matter; rather he attributes human feelings in some degree to everything, and throughout he sees a force, a power, an intangible, which he does not know how to define and which thinks, loves, laments, and weeps.

and-such a liquid, that animal, object, or liquid assumes a certain sacredness, and the Bambara calls it a tné. It thus conforms to the definition of a taboo that A. Lang gives us in Chapter III of his work Mythes, cults et religions, and Nicolay in Chapter II, Volume I, of his work Histoires des croyances, moeurs, coutumes also says: "To be taboo is to be marked by a religious sign."

The tné, or taboos, are legion in Bambara country. Not only does each lineage have its own, but the goua, or families, the confraternities, villages, individuals, genii, and plants also have theirs. Many are permanent in that they are perpetuated from generation to generation. Others, on the contrary, are impermanent; they pass, fall into disuse, disappear, or are dropped as soon as they become inconvenient. All depends upon the authority from which they are derived.

Taboos can be divided into five groups. There are lineage taboos, family taboos, taboos of the djiné genii and the boli genii, and finally plant taboos. I have given some legends concerning lineage taboos (see p. 8 ff.); these are permanent, passed on from generation to generation, and cannot disappear. /23/ They embody the idea of the ancestor, not in the sense that they merge and become one, but rather because the animal or plant has saved the stock by saving him. The tné have become the fathers of the Bambara in the broad sense of the word; they are, on an ancestor's name, or diamou, like armorial bearings on a shield, and a Bambara cannot rid himself of them. The ancestor has bound himself to the tné as a result of a service rendered, and his oath has made the union so close that if one disappeared the other would disappear with it -- how could one repudiate someone who is, and was, an ancestor and whose name, or diamou one bears!

Family taboos also have their legends and resemble those of lineages. They are different, however; the service was rendered to a member of the family and not to its head. In addition, the taboos are less extensive and include only a part of a species or race. To cite just one example, certain Dambélé may not buy, raise, kill, or eat a da-n-fign, or black dog, but they are not thereby prevented

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from owning, killing, or eating a dog of another color; a dish of dog is even a delicacy served during orgies in honor of the fetishes Nia, Komo, Kono, Nama, etc. The dog is taboo for them, but only the black dog, and the reason is as follows: A Dambélé family was working their fields, and every noon the wife in charge of cooking brought them gruel. One fine day the cook, seeing her child asleep, laid him on the mat and left.... Hardly had she reached the field when the big black dog arrived, yapping and whining, running toward the village and coming back, and yapping and whining even more. This performance puzzled everyone, and they all dropped their hoes and followed the dog back to the village. The dwelling had been consumed by fire and was only a pile of ashes.... "My child, my child," cried the mother at once, desperate and wild with grief.... And the dog pranced around her, put its paws on her shoulders, licked her with joyful growls, and seemed to say to her: "Have no fear, I have saved him." It had in fact saved the child; seeing the fire in the dwelling, it thought of the child, took him gently in its mouth, and carried him to the hut where karité nuts were being roasted. They found him there, well and safe, sound asleep, and from that day on they took the black dog as tné; all the family respected and /24/ venerated it, and their descendants still respect and venerate it today.

784 Family tné sometimes become taboo for a whole village. For example, where the Dambélé of the black dog are powerful because of their number and especially through their affinal ties, members of outside lineages avoid raising these dogs or eating their flesh, out of respect for the old people and to spare the feelings of their wives and families. Little by little the custom takes root and the animal becomes a tné or taboo for everyone.

Its durability, however, is nowhere near that of a lineage taboo. A Dambélé woman married into a village where the black dog is not taboo may refrain as much as possible from eating its flesh, but she will not fear it long. Little by little the taboo is forgotten, and only a vague memory stays with her: "An dougou tné do, for the village I came from it is taboo," she may say, but it will seem to her that for her it is no longer so. As to members of outside

772 more, to a brother, one of his people? It is more difficult for a Bambara to deserve hell than to avoid it; thus they need not think about it and never do think about it.

Paradise hardly absorbs their thoughts more. The thought that they are called upon to contemplate the Creator, to live near Him and rejoice in Him, has not touched them for a long time; they have evolved too far; they have reached the last runs of degradation, and to go lower they would have to be Moslems. Furthermore, the paradise of Mohammed seems absurd to them! That indecent corps of virgins with modest looks and beautiful black eyes, whose color makes them resemble ostrich eggs carefully hidden in the sand (2), leaves them

2. Koran, Chap. XXXVII - v. 47.

indifferent. They still prefer the ones here below, undoubtedly on the principle /83/ that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" /literally: "one good thing that you have is worth 36 that you will have"/. Virginity is too beautiful for the Bambara to have a word [83] for it; it is the flower of a day which a girl of ten no longer has. And what does it matter to them whether a woman is young or somewhat [562] mature, virgin or not, pretty or ugly; to them a woman, a real one, is a good servant, a good cook, and one who provides carnal pleasure at a man's will without ever tiring.

The pleasures and joys of this earth suffice for the Negro; he wishes for no others, and no doubt that is why he believes in a perpetual return. If, when barely in the grave, he already lives again in the womb of a woman, could the idea of judgment after death, the idea of the end of the world and a new judgment, make an impression on his mind? Can he who lives again and again conceive of the end of the world?

773 It is senseless to speak of their knowledge of Adam, father of 829 the human race, and of Eve, his wife. The Bambara meaning of the words Adama (Adam) and Awa (Eve) are quite different from the one we give them. When a missionary, a Moslem, or any European introduces himself to them as the son of Adam and Eve, these words are to them generic terms denoting the first father and the first mother

773 of a race, but not words that denote the first father and mother of the
829 human species. A pure Bambara does not believe in the unity of mankind; God created the white man white and the black man black, to use his expression, and to each He has given a father and a mother of his own color.

829 Nor has the arrival of the Europeans and the Moslems changed
582 any of his ideas in this respect. For many, each tribe and each caste had a first father and a first mother, and if there are castes which cannot be united by marriage, this seems to me to be the reason. "An té sé, a yé noumoy yé an yé Bamana déou yé an té si (1) kélé-n-yé,

1. Si: "similar" or "like nature;" "of the same race, descent, origin, people, nature."

we cannot marry each other, he is noumou (blacksmith) and we are not of the same people, the same blood, the same stock, the same father." Some seem to me very explicit when they say: "Án té fa kélé-n-yé, we are not of the same father." /84/

Chapter 5

000 Fetishism among the Bambara; The Worship of the Gnéna Classification of the Gnéna, Who are Identical with the Arab Djiné

1. What is Meant by Gnéna or Djiné

776 The Supreme Being, the Bambara God, lives up above behind the blue sky, gliding through happy and quiet days with his celestial band, the good angels (méléké) that form His court, and, omnipotent though He is, He is without priest or sacrifice. For He concerns Himself very little with men. He has divided the dominion of creation with the djiné, His laws, which are immutable, He has decreed once

Since all the Bambara could not be made to submit to shameful servitude, the Moslems were satisfied to impose a tax, to forbid public worship of the idols, and, with sheathed sword, sought to make converts by persuasion. Their caravans were quick to cover the country, preaching Islam in all places both favorable and unfavorable, but the mass of the people could not be approached. In order to give /131/ their beliefs a rational basis, they always did everything in the name of "Alla, " "Stamboul" (the Sultan of Constantinople), and "Makka (Mecca), and said to the conqueror: "All true belief comes from Mecca (Makka); it is the center of all religious life, so why do you fight so hard against our boli? They all come from Mecca. God has given you the formula: 'there is no Divinity other than God and Mohammed is His prophet'; for you He prescribes ablutions, Friday rest, etc.. Keep your formula and shout it! To us Bambara He has given the boli and bloody sacrifices, so why do you want to take from us our treasures that are hungry for blood?" I do not doubt that we owe our "legend" to the discussions which arose between the m'rabet (the marabout, or Moslem priest) and the gnâtigi, or bolitigi. Here it is as I so often heard it told by bold old men:

A group of youths who were devoting themselves to trade and following lady luck (ou toumbe kolo (1) gnini, "they were seeking

1. Kolo, "cowrie shells" (singular, koké), small shells used as money.

cowrie shells"), one day took the road to the east. Over mountains and valleys the little band walked and walked for a long time, and then finally they reached the great, blue, salty water, the ocean, on the shores of which lies the holy city, Mecca (Makka) (2).

2. Since the Moslems said that Mecca was located on the seacoast, and since the Bambara did not know Arabia, they believed it to be in this direction. In their minds the ocean does not have to be crossed to get there. Actually, this is the least of their worries.

773 Their stay there lasted several years, and no one expected to
774 see them again. It was said that bandits had fallen upon them and
794 massacred them or reduced them to slavery, and funeral rites were to be given them. The sanga fo (3) in their honor began; the women

3. Condolences from acquaintances to the family of the deceased.

wept, filling the air with their cries, and after several days of dancing, everybody went back to pleasure and work.

The young Bambara were not dead, they came back, and, better yet, were in no way stained by Mohammedanism. Even in the heart of Mecca they met a Bambara tribe, brothers who were thoroughly fetishist, and their secret rites, sacred dances, and sacrifices made more impression on their hearts and imaginations than the worn and cold formula, stupid prostrations, and tiresome /132/ ablutions of the sons of Islam. They were initiated into the rites of the gnâ, or boli; they bought some; and one fine day, rich in gold and silver, flocks of goats and sheep, women and slaves, they took the road back to the Niger. The caravan was large, the loads heavy, the road was barely passable, and discouragement touched the hearts of the bravest more than once. Finally, they reached the great river and the loads and boli filled boats by the hundreds.

The start of the voyage was happy; only a very few loads fell into the water and were lost going through rapids. Then a day came when everything changed; the wind started to blow violently; the water boiled, foamed, and swelled; and the boats, made of two hollowed tree trunks placed end to end and bound together with weak ropes, crashed together and broke. Who can tell how many disappeared in the floods that day with all their cargoes! The loss was great, especially in boli, but these have the power of gods, and they quickly changed into fish. According to the legend there have been torpedo fish, manatee, etc. in the depths of the river since that day.

Everything was not lost, however. When the travelers arrived in the Bélédougou and the Ben-dougou (1), they still had a large stock

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1. Bélédougou: bélé, "ferruginous rock"; dougou, "village," "country"; a province back of Bamako kati. Ben-dougou: ben, "meet"; dougou, "country"; the eastern end of Bambara country, on the Bani.

of boli. People came running from all directions. Of course there were festivals and amusements, and everyone wanted news and wished to learn about this Mecca which was so vaunted by the Moslems. "It is indeed a large city," they said, "but do not think that all they know there is the worn formula la ilah ill l'allah, which is shouted by the sons of the Prophet all day long. At Mecca there are Bambara (2) who sacrifice to genii as we do. They have additional rites that

2. This word Bambara (Bamana) of the legend denotes less the people than the religion, and it seems to me that it should be understood in the sense of kafri, as already indicated in speaking of the origin of the word Bambara. (As I pointed out /in Chap. IV, 3/ I believe its original meaning to have been "rebel" and not "son of the alligator" or of the fish ban ma, a kind of tench.)

you do not know; /133/ they know how to protect themselves from evil genii and demons; they sacrifice to the boli. The latter /boli/ are terrible. They kill anyone who insults or displeases them and actually have consideration only for those who give themselves to them and become their children. Thanks to them, our brothers in Mecca are rich and powerful and live to be old. They quickly discover thefts, lies, and adultery. In fact, the boli render justice, and whoever asks it of them cannot lie with impunity. The deepest insult against them is to call on them to witness a lie; they always take vengeance for this offense, causing endless evils to its perpetrator

773 778 794 and even going so far as tocause his death." These accounts excited the Negroes' curiosity; they wished to see the boli, wanted to sacrifice to them. They gave themselves to the boli, and thus became their children.

Once the people were initiated, the travelers unveiled the mysteries to them, bound them by the law of secrecy. They imposed upon them the prohibition against admitting uninitiated men and women and children to their ranks, and the sects were formed. These have multiplied continuously; each boli has its own, and since the boli are male and female and produce children, they have become legion, and each village has sects and boli of its own. Although the 778 794 worship of the boli has not destroyed that of the gnéna, or djiné, it has long exceeded the latter; their sacrifices and drinking bouts are accompanied by an external pomp that has a different grandeur, and no important action is taken without their agreement. It can be asserted without fear of error that the worship of the gnâ, or boli, is the chief religion of the Bambara at the present time. It is the basis of union within families and the foundation of the sina-n-koun, or sworn friendship; through the boli the people of the same village are closely united, and this union extends from one village to another and from one province to another, since all members of a boli's sect are brothers and owe each other mutual assistance under certain specified circumstances.

776 778 782 In the Bambara's mind (and I have spoken of this at length in my chapter, "The Ideas of the Bambara are not of Islamic Origin"), the boli are nothing less than intrinsically evil beings in revolt against the Supreme Being, God the Creator and Lord of all things. As the formula of the sacrifice to Touafé Bla suggests, the place where they dwell is fire or hell, and there is not a Negro who will not tell you /134/ that the boli is a demon (sétané). Can it not be said that his religion is a worship rendered to "Satan himself?" He renders this worship in full knowledge of what he is doing. Have I not heard the sacrificer in a sacrifice to a Nama boli (1), shout before cutting the

1. A note by Father Coppe of the White Fathers (unpublished manuscript).

roosters, two red kola nuts, and one dégenéni, an infant of two to three months."

Since the French occupation and the suppression of slavery, human beings are no longer sacrificed regularly. All the legends give one to understand, moreover, that they were always unusual and very infrequent. Yet who will ever be able to say what took place, and what still takes place nowadays at night in those sacred groves which only initiates can enter? One can always imagine that, lacking sacrifices, the initiates of the siri, the fetish of the souba or soubaga, disinter corpses in order to have human blood to offer to their idol and human flesh to taste. It is a unanimous belief among all the Negroes that they do so, and no sacrifice is made to the gnéna, to the gnâ, or to the shades of ancestors without a repetition of the words: "Protect us from the souba," -- in other words: "Protect us against the initiates of siri." These souba, of which I have already spoken /140/ in my chapter on metamorphosis (see above, p. 29), do not seem to differ in any way from the occult religious sects of the Basêzi of Uganda and the Baswêzi of the Ouchirombo, the cannibals of the equator.

And of what are they made, all these boli that for the most part have their temples and their sacred groves? A little of everything, I think, goes into the making of these horrors. Many times have I untangled these blood-coated gods and found only the bark of trees, roots, horns of goats, deer, and bulls, and finally claws of almost all quadrupeds. It is said that the Komo of Tigini, 30 or 35 kilometers from Ségou, is the body of a child. The legend says it was made by one Kari, the great-great-grandfather of the man who owns it at present, and this miserable man pushed barbarism to the point of taking his first grandson, a few months old, and grinding him alive in a mortar. An almost identical legend is current about the Komo of Kégné in Bani country which is at present in the hands of quite a young man called Marka N'zan. It is even said that if the first child of the owner of this latter fetish is a boy it belongs to the Komo. Is this child sacrificed or do they simply poison him? I have nothing definite on this matter.